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CALL IT LIFE



# CALL IT LIFE

BY

GEORGE SAVA

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

WE ALL know that there is truth in the commonplace 'Life is stranger than fiction' and the story I am going to relate bears out this contention.

*Call It Life* is a *true story* and, as far as my memory is reliable, every episode of Margaret's life, her family, her joys and sorrows, is factual. I have even abstained from the author's licence to sentimentalize or to present everyday occurrences in poetical or romantic style. Any travesty of the truth, to my mind, would not better the narrative. One cannot improve on truth and that is why the only licence I have taken is to change the surnames of the characters. Margaret, her husband, her children, her friends and her enemies were all living and I actually met them. The world events that shook Europe were reflected in the tragic story of Margaret's life. They, too, are presented in their unadorned perspective.

In conclusion, I would like to dedicate this book to Margaret, whose permission I have to relate her life's story.



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**GERMANY**



## CHAPTER I

### THE BEGINNING OF THE END

COMMERCIAL travellers have a fascinating phrase to describe the luck of their unpredictable profession. They say, with a kind of grim resignation: "You never know what's inside that door." To a doctor, this sentence might well be turned inside out, for to him it is the person outside the door who may be the bringer of all manner of luck, good, bad, or indifferent. A ring on the doorbell, a call to the telephone—either may be the prelude to a long and interesting case, the passport to a land of human tragedy, or even the callboy to a new and exciting friendship that far outlasts mere professional contact. One never knows. And though there are times—many times—when the urgent burr of the telephone bell fills one with weariness or distaste, always there is, behind it, a summons to the adventure of the unknown.

It was the telephone that gave the signal, with its strident bell, for the final stages of an experience and a friendship that in some ways were among the most moving and tragic I have ever known. That call set in motion the stilled wheels of memory carrying me back into the past—and was also to project me into a strange episode in the future. And, like most of the summonings of Fate, it came casually, without preliminary. It was just one of those calls which the doctor has. . . .

I was at the hospital. It had been a relatively quiet morning, and I was sitting writing up some notes for my casebook. When the bell on the extension telephone tinkled I barely noticed it, and my reaction in picking up the instrument and putting it to my ear was entirely automatic.

"Hullo!" I said. I am always being told that that is not the right way to answer a telephone, that I should promptly

'announce my identity' or give the number, but I prefer the old habit and I doubt if anything will ever break me of it.

"Just a moment, Mr. Sava," said the operator, and there was that usual pause followed by her clearly enunciated "You're through."

All this time, I had remained quite unconcerned, my mind still on the operation on which I had been making my notes. It had been an interesting case and would provide rich material for the medical book I was then engaged in writing. But as soon as I heard the voice at the other end, I forgot all about the case and the book and my notes. It electrified me.

I knew the voice all right: it was the voice of Margaret Godfrey. But I had never heard her use that tone before. This was the voice of tragedy crying out to me, a voice calling to me for help across the miles of copper they tell me makes up the telephone system. But it was not, at that moment, medical help she needed; it was the help of a friend.

"Please, George, come at once—please, please, please," she implored me. "They're here now, and I'm frightened."

"But tell me, Margaret," I said, "what is it that's the matter? Who are there?"

"Oh, come, don't waste time," she returned frantically; and I heard her say something else, apparently to someone standing by the telephone. I knew a very great deal about Margaret's history and present circumstances—a very great deal indeed. I was worried. There was real fear in her voice, and everything suggested that if she was left to face whatever her crisis was alone, the results might be disastrous.

"Very well," I said. "I will come as soon as I can—at once."

I added those words 'at once' because she had immediately started to importune me again. It was lucky I was having a slack morning, otherwise I should not have been able to get away so soon. As it was, I took only a few minutes to finish off what had to be done, and in less than a quarter

of an hour I was on my way in the car to Margaret's house, which was situated in one of the quieter streets of Chelsea.

So poor Margaret Godfrey was in trouble again, I thought, as I watched the traffic lights impatiently, as I always do, whether I am in a hurry or not. It was not at all unusual, for difficulties, unhappiness, and problems seemed to be attracted to her like iron filings to a magnet. It was not so very long since, at last, she seemed to have composed all her differences with Destiny and staked out a firm and lasting claim to at least a quiet reposeful evening to her life. That was when she had married David Godfrey. Perhaps that marriage did not have all the omens in its favour. Godfrey was several years younger than she, and was a widower into the bargain, with a small boy. The wiseacres shook their heads and said that it was a case of his wanting a nurse-housekeeper and her seeking security for her failing years.

These slanders were quite wrong. If it was not a match of young love, it was certainly based on real affection and mutual attraction. They had known each other some time, and at the outset their lives appeared destined to settle down in one of the quiet, unruffled partnerships which endure. More than that, little Edward had taken an instant liking to his new 'mother', as she had to him. It would have been a successful match if those two had been left alone.

How many marriages that might have been happy and lasting have been ruined by the selfishness and interference of relations? And how many have persisted in the face of these outrageous difficulties? No one can tell, though the total must be very large. The match between David and Margaret belonged to the latter class. It had withstood, in its short life, a series of blows and shocks—and that itself was a testimony to its firm foundations. But there had been moments when it seemed on the point of breaking, when one or other had stood, metaphorically, on the very threshold of the lawyer's office bearing instructions to institute divorce proceedings. It was a wholly scandalous thing—a terrible

example of how the love of a mother for her child can be perverted into a grasping, utterly selfish possessiveness.

For David had married in the face of his mother's opposition. It had been a courageous thing for him to do, for though he had been married already and was a father, though he held quite a good position as an engineer in an ordnance factory—a position war conditions had very materially improved—he had remained very much under his mother's thumb. Naturally quiet and complaisant, he had never quite broken away from the idea of maternal authority, which had been exercised in a dotingly autocratic way throughout his boyhood.

Probably the mere fact that David had shown independence and wanted for a second time to break away from her, incensed the elder Mrs. Godfrey. It was an insult to her *amour-propre*, her sense of what a carefully nurtured only son owed to his mother. The circumstances of the match aggravated those feelings. Margaret Godfrey was not English, being of German descent; and that alone was a crime in the eyes of this primly respectable middle-class Englishwoman. Besides that, Margaret was a woman with, in the eyes of Julia Godfrey, a variegated past, of which something was known and of which the unknown part was probably shocking beyond endurance. If Julia Godfrey had allowed herself to put it into words, she would probably have called Margaret a designing minx intent on leading her son astray. That he could have any real affection for her, or she for him, was beyond her powers of imagination. She still saw David as a small boy who had to be protected from the temptations and terrors of the world.

Failing to dissuade him from the course he had chosen, she had turned all her spite and venom on Margaret. Perhaps she imagined that if she made Margaret's life a hell, Margaret would weaken and give up a struggle she felt beyond her. When she had made up her mind, Julia Godfrey made it a total war. She wrote Margaret the most appalling and

insulting letters—letters that threatened, letters that were probably libel, letters that wounded deliberately. She supported her attack by telephone calls, till Margaret began to fear the coming of the postman and the ringing of the telephone bell. From time to time, Julia Godfrey called. When she did so, she ignored Margaret. She tried to dominate David and even little Edward, whom she tried to lead away from his stepmother. In Margaret's presence, she would suggest to David that Margaret was ruining the child, making him as bad as she represented Margaret to be.

This attack was naturally not without results. Life in that home grew strained. The nerves of both David and Margaret were on edge, for David's courage had gone no further than defying his mother on the marriage question. He was being pulled this way and that, now agreeing with his mother that he should try to divorce Margaret—Julia Godfrey was convinced that ample evidence could be found without difficulty—and now responding to his affection for Margaret. On balance, the latter proved slightly the stronger, but it gave him no more than a mulish stubbornness against his mother's designs. He had not the strength of will to try to put a stop to Julia's scurrilous attacks. He got no further than passive resistance. And if Margaret had had even a little less determination he would have yielded almost without a fight to his mother's desires.

It was a sordid background, a tragic outcome for what might have been so very different if David and Margaret had been left to work out their own lives with little Edward. Here was potential happiness ruined by a woman who mistook possessiveness for love, utter selfishness for protection against an imagined evil. It led to tragedy, but the tragedy was not the direct result of the campaign of abuse. It was, in fact, entirely extraneous, yet it was so much of a piece with the rest that it was almost as though all these people were mere puppets acting some macabre scene written by the gloomier Fates.

It was in February, 1944, when London was suffering a renewed air attack by the Luftwaffe—the attack that later became known as the ‘baby blitz’. David, as I have said, was an engineer—a stress calculator, I believe, though the intricacies of engineering are beyond me. Like all engineers in this war and so many others besides, he was as often at work at night as by day.

That February night his factory was hit. It was only a small bomb—those attacks were never really heavy—but the establishment was full of highly inflammable and explosive stuff. It was one of those lucky hits that must have counterbalanced to a slight extent, from the military point of view, the lavish waste of ammunition on the useless and wanton destruction of little homes. The place went up like some setpiece at a firework display. There were quite a number of fatal casualties. Among them was David Godfrey.

I had heard of the disaster and had, of course, written to Margaret, but beyond a rather broken note in reply a week or so later I had heard nothing more, and the time since had been so short that I had not ventured to intrude on a grief that I knew must be deep and real. Gossip had reached me that there had been trouble with the mother, but that was only to be expected. I could easily imagine that to Julia Godfrey, Margaret might well become David’s murderer. Even so, anticipating nothing but the worst, I hardly expected to find the harassing scene that greeted me when I arrived.

Margaret opened the door to me. Her eyes were red and swollen with tears, but there was something about her expression and manner which suggested they had been tears of wrath and passion rather than tears of grief. She was in a state bordering on the hysterical, with rage battling with despair, desperation conflicting with grief.

“Oh, I’m so glad you’ve come, George,” she said, taking my hand; and without anything more she led me into what she had always called, with a curious deference to old-

fashioned convention, the drawing-room, though a more modern-minded person would have entitled it the lounge.

It was certainly an extraordinary sight. Standing in front of the fireplace, looking calm, unruffled, and, if the truth be told, rather wooden, was a tall, broad man that could be no one else but a policeman. The very neat serge suit completed the picture. A little to his left was Julia Godfrey, whom I had seen once or twice before. She was a stern, hard-faced woman in the early sixties, with greying hair and sharp, dark-brown eyes. I noted almost mechanically that age, with its glandular changes, had given her face an extraordinarily masculine outline and that the upper lip was fringed with hair—though not all this, I suspect, was due to years; I imagine Julia Godfrey must always have been a masculine woman. She was standing squarely, a symbol of utter determination—that determination which springs not only from inner conviction but also from the very comforting knowledge that law and order and the powers of the State are on one's side. On the far side of the room, shrinking into himself as though he had suffered some extreme shock, was little Edward.

Edward was a curious, small boy. In appearance, he was inclined to be effeminate, but there was a paradoxical suggestion of firmness and determination about him which may have come from his grandmother; certainly it did not come directly from his father. He was fair with blue eyes—characteristics that may have been responsible for that first impression of effeminacy, and he had long, tapering hands of the kind popularly associated with the artist. He was dressed in grey flannel shorts and jacket and a bright-coloured shirt.

Julia looked at me sharply as I came in.

"Who is this, Margaret?" she demanded angrily. "This is hardly the time to introduce strangers into the house."

Margaret was obviously too overwrought to reply, so I took the situation in hand as best I could.

"I am hardly a stranger," I said. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am George Sava, and I have had the privilege of being Margaret's medical adviser for some considerable time. I have also had the honour of being her friend for very many years. She asked me to come here now because of her very great distress. It looks to me as though she does stand in need of a friend at hand." I tried to make that last sentence sound as cutting as I could.

Julia snorted in a most inelegant and unladylike way, yet also with an air of haughtiness. I thought that at any moment she might produce a lorgnette and quiz me.

"You are a foreigner," she rejoined in an accusing way.

"I am a British citizen," I responded, not anxious to let her prejudices run riot. "But that does not matter. I am here to help Margaret, and as her friend I claim the right to be here."

I was fighting for time. As yet I did not know what the trouble was all about. All I was conscious of was the distress of Margaret and the very obvious antagonism of Julia. She had given me a glance that told me quite clearly what was in her mind. "Oh," she was thinking, "you're a foreigner and one of this woman's men friends"; and she promptly assumed the worst from those premisses.

Rather appealingly I glanced at Margaret. She had crossed the room to Edward, who had instantly nestled to her for protection. Then I looked at the policeman, who was rocking slightly from side to side as he stood with his feet apart and his hands behind his back like a soldier standing at ease. As his eyes met mine, he cleared his throat. He saw I stood in need of explanations and he felt the duty fell on him.

"There is a bit of an argument, sir," he said, a trifle apologetically, and with that suggestion of deference which is so typical of the English police and which so misleads those unfamiliar with their ways. "Mrs. Julia Godfrey here, the child's grandmother, has obtained an interim order for the child to be removed to a home for care and protection,

pending an action for her to obtain perpetual custody. Mrs. Margaret Godfrey refuses to give up the child. I regret to say, sir, that there have been somewhat high words between the ladies."

"But that is preposterous!" I exclaimed. "Why should the child be taken away from here?"

He shook his head, as if to say plainly that whys and wherefores were not his concern.

"That's not for me to say, especially as it will come before the Courts. I am only here to see that the order is obeyed. I implore your help, sir. If Mrs. Margaret Godfrey persists in her attitude, she will bring very serious trouble upon herself."

"You can see for yourself that the child is fond of his step-mother," I said, glancing in the direction of Edward, who was now clinging desperately to Margaret. "It's a crime to take him away from someone he loves and who loves him."

"I can't discuss that, sir," said the police officer firmly, but still with that suggestion of deference. "That is something the Court will have to decide. I understand that the order was made on an *ex parte* application."

I knew what an *ex parte* application was vaguely; it meant, I believed, that only one side, Julia Godfrey's side, had been heard. It struck me as utterly scandalous that an order of this kind could be made in such circumstances. I looked at Margaret.

"What do you say about it, Margaret?" I asked.

"I think as you do that it's a crime, George," she said. Her voice was steadier now. "I won't let him go. It's only the spite of a horrible old woman."

Julia bridled. Her face flushed.

"Remember you're talking in front of witnesses, woman," she snapped. "If you say things like that . . ."

"Now let's try to be calm," I interposed. "The position seems to be that an order has been made to remove Edward to some home or other, and that Margaret refuses to let him

go. What happens if she persists?" I asked, turning to the policeman.

He coughed softly. "It would be disobeying an order of the Court, sir—a very serious thing."

"I see. Even if that order should be unjust and cruel?"

"As I've said, sir," he returned patiently, "that is not for me to say. The order has been made and it must be executed."

"But if it's an order of the Court and you are here to see that it is carried out," I went on, "what is Mrs. Julia Godfrey doing here, and what has she to do with it?"

"She obtained the order, sir, and is an interested party."

Julia could contain herself no longer. "It's no concern of yours, Mr.—er—Sava," she said, "but as you seem to have thrust your way in, as one would expect of a foreigner, I think the order is a disgrace. I should have the custody of this child—this poor little boy. It's a sin to think he could be left at the mercy of that creature."

I gave her a look and crossed to Margaret.

"Margaret," I said in a low voice, "I don't see what there is to be done, except let Edward go for the time being. He's not going to that woman's, after all, but to a home, and I believe the whole thing will come before the Courts in a little while. Is that right?"

She nodded brokenly. "I can't let him go, George. How can I? He'll be so unhappy—and he's all I've got left."

"It will only be for a little while," I comforted her. "I have no doubt what the outcome will be if this thing is properly handled. If you refuse, you will get yourself into more trouble and may make things very difficult all round."

"Oh, George," she exclaimed, "I thought you'd be able to help me."

"I intend to," I replied. "I think the whole thing is utterly scandalous. And as for that old harridan over there, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to pitch her out neck and crop. But that won't help matters. You've got to see reason. This order must be obeyed. Can't you see that?"

"Yes, I suppose so." She looked down at the boy, pressing his small body against her. "But it will be terrible. I don't know what they'll do to him."

"Then you agree?"

"If you say there is nothing else, I must," she replied.

"Leave it to me."

Ignoring Julia, who had been eyeing us during our talk with utter savagery, so that I longed to put my threat into action, I faced the police officer.

"The child must be handed over to you—is that it?" I asked.

He nodded. "Since I have been called in, that is so, sir. Of course Mrs. Julia Godfrey really has the job of seeing that the order is executed."

"Very well. Then it must be like this. Mrs. Margaret Godfrey will bow to the inevitable and hand over the child . . ."

"So I should think," snapped Julia.

I took not the slightest notice of her. ". . . but she will only hand the child over to you and on the distinct understanding that he is taken to the home, wherever it is, and that Mrs. Julia Godfrey is allowed no access to him until the decision of the Court is obtained. Otherwise, Mrs. Margaret Godfrey will resist, whatever the cost."

He nodded. "Yes, sir. That is the strict interpretation of the order, as it happens. It always is in these cases. You understand that, madam?" he asked, turning to Julia; and I had the impression he rather enjoyed being able to speak to her a little sharply.

"I object," she retorted. "That child must be got away from this evil influence and led back into the right paths."

"He will be in safe hands in the home," said the police officer placidly. "The Court must decide on the final issue. Come on, old man," he said very kindly to Edward, who shrank closer to Margaret and began to sob.

She spoke to him softly, but his tears did not abate. Very

gently she disengaged his small clinging hands from her dress and handed him to the policeman.

"I'll go and get his coat," she said. "I suppose I shall have to send some things on," she added, catching her voice in a sob.

"The home will get in touch with you, madam," said the policeman very gently. He was a kind-hearted man, and I had begun to like him. I felt that he would make things as easy as possible, and that so far as his professional conscience allowed him to have sympathies, they were with us. I watched him when Margaret, after a little hesitation, ran from the room. He began to talk to the boy, cajoling and winning his confidence, so that when Margaret returned, she found Edward firmly grasping the policeman's hand and looking tearfully up at him out of large, round eyes.

She did not speak while she slipped on his coat and gloves. But when he was dressed and the policeman slowly began to lead Edward to the door, I could see her bosom rise and fall as she tried to choke down her sobs.

"Good-bye, Edward darling," she said, so quietly that I could barely hear her. "You'll be coming back soon."

He kissed her, and the tears trickled down his face.

Julia turned to follow the policeman, but he held up his hand in a restraining gesture.

"You cannot come with me, madam. For the time being, this child is in the custody of the police. You will be advised, I don't doubt, when the terms of the order have been obeyed and he is in the home. I must ask you not to follow me, madam."

She stopped, and her expression was evil. I could see that she felt she had been fooled, and that the law, which she had thought to bring in as her ally, had in her opinion turned traitor to her and gone over to the other side. No doubt she had hoped by this legal trick to get Edward under her influence for a little while, so that when the case came for hearing, she would be able to bring witnesses to say how

happy and contented he had been with her. As Margaret's friend, I was perhaps prejudiced against Julia Godfrey. But even allowing for that I had seen enough that morning to convince me that she was not the person to have charge of a sensitive child like little Edward. She would mould him into another David, a man with little spirit and initiative.

There was a dead silence after the policeman withdrew. I could hear plainly the sound of his feet as he walked along the short tiled path that led to the front door, the slam of the car door, and the whine of the starter. Julia stood firmly, her face seething with anger. When, after ten minutes had elapsed, she still remained, I turned to her.

"I think, Mrs. Godfrey," I said as politely as I could, "it might be more tactful if you left now."

"Who are you," she blazed, "to turn me out of this house? It was my son's, and I've more right here than anyone."

"I am acting for Margaret," I replied, keeping my temper as best I could; "she is not in a fit state to look after her affairs. As for your right to be here, madam, I do not know the provisions of your son's will, but I do not imagine it has been proved yet, and in the meantime your son's widow has prior rights to this house. On her behalf, I ask you to leave immediately."

She seemed about to make some flaming retort, but checked herself. Without a word, she picked up her gloves from an occasional table and walked to the door. I did not see her out. I felt that in circumstances like this even the common courtesies were better left unobserved.

After a little while I patted Margaret on the shoulder. She was brooding, dry-eyed, on her troubles.

"Come, Margaret, don't take it so tragically. We'll see this thing through together and all will turn out for the best. You're tired and overwrought and must rest. You'd better not be alone. Isn't there some friend you could go to?"

She did not seem to understand what I said, so I repeated it.

"Yes, I suppose that would be best," she said. "There's Jane Little over at Bayswater who'd certainly take me in."

"Get your things, then, and I'll take you there in the car."

She was a long time getting ready, and I was beginning to grow rather impatient, when at last she came back. I noticed she had done little enough to repair the ravages of her distress—and that is a sign of a very low condition in a woman. Despite the time she had been absent, her coat looked as though it had been very hurriedly slipped on without so much as a glance in the mirror, and she seemed to have dabbed a powder puff mechanically on her face, leaving little hard blotches of light that showed up instead of concealing the redness of her eye-rims and the pallidness of her cheeks.

"Don't you want to take anything with you?" I asked, seeing that she had no case of any kind.

She shook her head. "Jane will fix me up," she said dully.

I did not argue. She was beyond that sort of thing. During the whole run to Bayswater she did not say a word, and when we parted and I repeated my assurances of coming good luck and my intention to help her all I could, she merely nodded. The reaction had set in. After her wild display of emotion, she had gone numb and lifeless.

It was late, and I had patients to see in the afternoon. There would only be time for a quick snack lunch. It had been a disturbing morning altogether. Poor Margaret! I thought. And my memories went back to the days when I had first met her and to the extraordinary events that had marked her life. It was a strange story, one well worth the telling.

## CHAPTER II

### THE JACOBIS

SHE WAS Margaret Jacobi then. That was in 1928, when I first met her in Germany, during my first year's work as a surgeon in Hanover. The Germany of that time was a land of mystery and contradictions. The strangest things happened and were accepted as normal, and contrasts that would have caused scandals in other lands were passed unnoticed. It seems easy now that a grim war has thrown a searchlight on the dark places of the German character to understand this period of apparent madness, but at the time the enigma of Germany seemed insoluble. There is nothing easier than to be wise after the event.

And Margaret Jacobi—I will give her the English form of her name, which she afterwards adopted and by which I have introduced her—was a very different person from the woman who had lived in that rather shabby-genteel house in Chelsea. Everyone in Hanover knew the Jacobis. Every business man in Germany either had met Isaac Jacobi or had heard of him. And a large number of people who were neither business men nor interested in the Jacobis' social circle took a close interest in his work for reasons of their own. The Jacobi factory in Hanover was massive and imposing, one of the earliest and least successful functional efforts of the Gropius-Bauhaus school, and at other places there were subsidiary plants that built components for the machine-tools that Jacobi produced in such large numbers for both home and overseas. But Isaac Jacobi, short, grim-faced, and with a thin, cruel mouth, was not an engineer; rather was he the financier-industrialist whose keen brain showed him how to turn conditions that brought suffering

and penury to others very much to his own advantage. And in those days, five years before Hitler was to create the Third Reich, the wealthy industrialist was a power in Germany such as he was not elsewhere.

I was interested in Margaret from the moment I first saw her. To use the inaccurate language that was to become popular through the Nazis years later, she was the perfect Aryan type, a flame-haired Nordic goddess such as the Vikings might have poured libations to in their drunken feasts. Her blue eyes had a sparkle in them that suggested diamonds of fine water, and her hands were white and delicate. Standing beside her squat, typically Semitic husband, she provided the perfect contrast. At that time the crude racial theories of the National Socialists had not made the Jewish problem a world topic, yet even so I could not help wondering what it was that had attracted two such opposites, especially as the difference between their ages was so marked. Margaret was in the late thirties and had still the figure and manner of the middle twenties. Isaac was already middle-aged and fleshy.

My visit was, of course, professional. My professor had sent me there in answer to an urgent call to see the Jacobis' son, the elder of the two children. He had been ill, though not very seriously, and the family doctor, with that exaggerated care so often given to rich patients, had advised a second opinion, since he had darkly suspected complications. Still young and enthusiastic and perhaps a little proud of appearing in the role of a specialist consultant, I had gone to the Jacobis' house almost hoping that there would be an interesting case to deal with. But I was soon disillusioned. The boy had had a bad cold, which had slightly affected his internal organs. That was all. The complications were a mirage of the family doctor, and the fee that I earned for my professor might easily have been saved, for there was no additional treatment that could be suggested.

Though I had not been in Hanover long, I had already heard of the Jacobis, but they had been no more than a name among many to me. But now that I had made their acquaintance I paid more attention to the talk that was always going round about them. Whether it was because I was now more interested or there was an actual increase in the gossip, I cannot tell, but it did seem to me, after that first visit, that I could not escape the Jacobis. If I went to a café or a beer garden, someone was sure to mention them. At the hospital, their affairs were a staple topic of conversation. In this way I learnt a lot about them, and though a lot of it was the usual malicious gossip that always surrounds the rich and successful, I managed to sort out the wheat from the chaff and piece together an interesting piece of family history.

There was Isaac Jacobi himself, a man who revealed in a specially strong form the characteristic of his race in being at once a devoted husband and admirable father, and a ruthless, utterly egotistical business man. Later, when I became a personal friend of the family, I was able to see for myself the loving care he gave to his wife and the two children—one a boy, the other a girl. Nothing was too good for any of them. If Isaac would argue over a price difference of as little as fifty marks in a contract running into thousands, he would begrudge his family nothing. If he would pay his employees no more than the minimum rate for the job, he saw to it that his children were amply supplied with pocket money. His business life and his family life were entirely distinct and might have been the expression of two absolutely different characters.

The foundation of the Jacobi fortune had been laid during the first World War. In 1914 his business was already well established but was neither large nor well-known. The war gave him his opportunity. And though he was of military age, and the German conscription laws were strict, his work of organizing production of essential tools was considered so important that field-grey never graced the form of Isaac

Jacobi. His works expanded and his income mounted. Steadily his funds flowed into Swiss and Swedish and South American banks. Jacobi knew what was a legitimate risk and what was not. He was prepared to take the one but avoided the other at all costs. He did not consider staking all on the victory of Imperial Germany against the embattled forces of the world, a risk that any prudent business man should take.

So it was that in 1919, when for most Germans the very bottom seemed to have dropped out of the world, he was still a rich and prosperous man. His foreign funds had been carefully placed, and he was able to use them to advantage in enlarging his business. In 1914, Jacobi machine-tools had been supplied in limited quantities to certain specialized German industries. During the four years of war, they had found their way into almost every munition factory of the Central Powers. By the early nineteen-twenties, Jacobi tools were being sent to many parts of the world and competing successfully with better-known and long-used American products. By his enterprise, his shrewd assessment of world conditions, Isaac Jacobi was building up reserves of foreign currency of stable value at a time when other and less adept businesses were confined to a shrinking and disastrous home market.

For the majority of German people, inflation spelt ruin. In those fantastic days, a million marks meant nothing. I am told that in England million-mark notes were being sold in the streets by hawkers as curiosities for a halfpenny each. But inflation did not bring disaster to everyone. The industrialists and financiers kept their wits—their very keen and agile wits—about them. In common with others of his class, Jacobi was able to buy property on a large scale—property that later was to bring him in a vast profit. In terms of marks, these purchases represented enormous sums; but in Swiss francs or Swedish kroner, they were almost trivial to Isaac Jacobi and those of his kind.

Nor was this all. The Reichsbank renewed loans wholesale to the industrialists so that they could undercut the world markets with their cheap goods. These loans were destined never to be repaid. They were the gifts of the suffering German people—particularly the middle class—to the undying cause of the German Junkers.

That contrast between the excessively rich and the incredibly poor was one of the most enraging features of the Germany of the early nineteen-twenties, and it left memories that rankled bitterly for many years to come. It was then that the seeds of the anti-Semitism which was to attain such abysmal depth of brutality and fiendishness under Hitler were sown. Not all the industrialists who made wealth and climbed to positions of power during the inflation were Jews: far from it. But the Jew, and particularly the German Jew, is a conspicuous person. He has an inborn desire for display which, grafted on to the German love of ostentation and self-aggrandizement, makes him exhibit his riches with a baroque splendour. It was these things that the people noticed.

They observed that many of the most successful and unscrupulous industrialists and financiers were Jews; they did not notice the Germans who were at least as successful and unscrupulous. They noted how many Jews occupied positions of importance in banks and railways, government offices and municipalities, hospitals and institutions; but they took as a matter of course the even greater number of true-born Germans who had bought, cajoled, or bullied their ways into posts no less important. They sneered at the Jew and his family alighting from their chromium-plated Mercedes-Benz outside a Berlin restaurant, but cleared a way deferentially for the general in jackboots with his blonde, big-breasted mistress. There were, in Germany and elsewhere, grasping, greedy, self-seeking Jews, as there are grasping, greedy, self-seeking men of all races. But just because the Jew has, throughout the centuries, remained an alien in every country, and because also, he had an

Eastern love of display and self-assertion, he is ever likely to be more noticed and to be saddled with sins which, though he may have committed them, are neither peculiarly nor even typically his.

It was on this that Hitler worked. The Jew was there. The Jew was noticeable and easily picked out. The Jew was an alien. Here was the scapegoat. And the people, with memories going back to the days when it had seemed to them that only Jews remained prosperous when the rest of the country starved, readily accepted the call.

I would not utter one word in defence of the policy that has led to the hellish horrors of Lublin and Warsaw. I would not lift my little finger to save a single German who has flogged or spat upon or chalked the seal of Solomon on a humble Jew. Rather would I see that German forced to endure a sample of the tortures that he himself has invented. But it is right that facts should be stated. To the unthinking and the superficial, to those whose powers of reasoning had become dulled by hunger and cold, it could easily have seemed in those dark days that the Jew was the only one on whom the wind of suffering did not blow. It was then, as I have said, that the seed of anti-Semitism was sown and fertilized. Left to itself it would have grown into but an ailing plant that would have soon wilted. But it was tended by fiendish gardeners who caused it to bring forth a great and monstrous fruit—a fruit that surely poisoned those who partook of it.

When Germany seemed to be tottering to the last depths of national bankruptcy, the United States took a hand, and the Dawes Plan was evolved.

That was in 1924, and the effects were soon evident. Foreign capital in the form of loans flowed freely into Germany. The rest of the world seemed to have no other desire than to rebuild Germany so that, once again, she could be strong and again develop megalomania. That, at any rate, is how it looks today. For four years, Germany basked

in the sun of prosperity. Industry expanded. Business multiplied. Employment increased. By 1928, Germany was once again a major factor in the world's trade. Moreover the very countries that had helped her through the Dawes Plan were beginning to suffer for their generosity, for the German product was underselling the world.

These were conditions that astute minds were quick to utilize to their own advantage—Isaac Jacobi among them. No doubt the principle is ethically wrong, but if mankind will persist in creating conditions in which the sharp-witted and selfish can prosper, it is not for mankind to say that those shrewd people are moral lepers. Rather let mankind see to it that the world never again puts a premium on financial smartness or hails as a superman he who steals his brother's birthright. It is in his environment that man feels the urge to crime and sin, whether he be in slum or luxury hotel, night club or secret monopoly conference.

And it was towards the end of this great burst of prosperity, in 1928, that I fell in with the Jacobis. Isaac was then probably at the summit of his career. His wealth was so great that mere enumeration in figures meant nothing—for there comes a stage at which money is meaningless. There is nothing more it can buy.

Within his own community, Isaac Jacobi was generous. No Jewish charity ever appealed to him in vain. But this side of his life, as, to a large extent, his family life, was concealed from the general public. It cannot be denied that Isaac Jacobi was not generally popular. Most people saw him only as the successful business man with the hardest head—and heart—in Hanover and perhaps in all Germany. No man rises from modest beginnings to outstanding wealth without exciting envy and even enmity. It is one of the coins one pays in the price of success. And like an undercurrent there ran through all the criticisms and gossip I heard about him the accusation, sometimes implied, sometimes outspoken: "He is a Jew."

Yet this was the side of which I saw least. To me, he was always the charming host. After I had left, that day I had examined Werner, the son, I had not expected to meet him again, unless perhaps I should call again professionally. I should have doubted if he would even remember me. So it was a great surprise when, a week or so later, I saw him at a hospital dinner, and he came across and spoke to me.

"Why, Dr. Sava," he exclaimed. "I am pleased to see you again. I did not thank you properly for your attention to Werner the other week."

"There was nothing to thank me for," I replied. "My attendance was quite superfluous, Herr Jacobi."

"Not at all. Did you not give me the finest piece of news a doctor can give a father? You said: 'There is nothing wrong with your son, Herr Jacobi'—those were your exact words. And you were right."

"I was pleased to be able to say them, *mein Herr*. But I do not expect thanks every time I do so."

He laughed. It was a short, sharp laugh that had very little real sense of amusement in it.

"Margaret was much struck by your thoroughness, *Herr Doktor*," he said. "She would like to see you again—and so would I. But socially, Dr. Sava—socially. You must come and dine with us. I will ask Grete to telephone you."

He passed on with a smile and a nod. The little colloquy was not unnoticed.

"You're a crafty devil, Sava," one of my colleagues remarked. "Rich and a Jew—what better friend could you have? Germany will soon be ruled entirely by Jews and foreigners."

I laughed. I had become used to the constant pricks at my non-German origin—those expressions of the national inferiority complex which lies at the root of the Germanic problem, as I think. *Ausländer*—foreigner! It did not take the Nazis to make that a word of abuse in the German tongue.

No further thought of Jacobi's suggestion came into my mind till one afternoon, just as I had finished work, I was called to the telephone. A female voice I did not recognize, yet vaguely familiar, spoke to me.

"Dr Sava?" it said. "This is Frau Jacobi speaking. My husband and I were wondering whether you would do us the honour of dining with us tomorrow night."

"I should be delighted," I replied with real warmth. I was still practically a stranger in Hanover and this invitation promised a pleasant break from the somewhat lonely routine into which I had fallen. She named the time and, after a few courtesies, rang off.

When, the next night, I presented myself, I was shown into a lounge that was the most opulently magnificent I had ever seen—and I had brought with me from my boyhood not a few vivid memories of the famous homes of Russia. This was different from those. It was modern—in the rather special sense. At that time, even in Germany, one had not grown used to glass and steel, and curious knobbly furnishing fabrics set against plain washes of colour. It startled me, but I had to admit that the deep-squabbed chair in which I was installed was extremely comfortable, even though the steel arms struck me as cold and forbidding. My cocktail was good and well iced and, while I was sipping it, my eyes centred on a picture on the wall. It was, I supposed, an example of modern art, but it looked to me as though a not very talented child had been given the freedom of an artist's palette.

Jacobi caught my glance and smiled.

"I see you are looking at my new Paul Klee," he said.

I nodded. I had heard only very vaguely of Paul Klee. I had not yet read the ingenious explanations of his pictures as 'going for a walk with a line'—nor did I know that he was one of the finest draughtsmen of the day: that picture certainly did not suggest it to me.

"I'm afraid I'm not very well up in modern art," I said.

"When one is a doctor, one has little enough time to attend to one's own job."

"Quite so, Sava. One should always put one's own job first, but there comes a time when one can relax and indulge in a little leisure. Even there, however, one need not be entirely indifferent to other things. I believe that it is good policy to buy the works of rising modern artists. If one buys Old Masters one buys on the top of the market—for I fail to see how prices can go much higher, while there is every likelihood of their falling. On the other hand, one can buy contemporary work for a quite trifling sum and there is always the possibility—almost the probability—that one can make a profit later on as their work becomes recognized. That is, of course, if one is guided by people who know and one cultivates one's own taste in these things. The experts tell me Klee is destined to achieve fame. What do you think?"

I shook my head. "I am no judge of these things. I find them difficult to understand. What does it represent?"

He laughed—again with that rather mirthless air.

"It's a good job I am not a fanatic for modern art, Sava," he replied. "You have asked the one question that would damn you at once, if I were. Modern art does not seek to represent. It expresses moods, tensions, the interaction of space, and all sorts of abstruse things, but it depicts nothing. Some modern artists might well borrow from the practice of authors and put a label on their pictures: 'Any resemblance between any living animal or actual thing in Nature is entirely fortuitous'." And again he gave that metallic laugh.

"I can see I have a lot to learn."

He went on to tell me quite a lot about the modern art movement, then so strong in Germany. He told me for the first time of men who were subsequently to become famous—of Gropius and Mendelsohn, for example—and he pointed out their work. That lounge was, in fact, an exhibition piece

of the work of the *avant-garde*. How much of it was due to Jacobi's genuine love of modernism and how much to his eye for a possible profit, I did not know, but I suspected the profit motive to be uppermost. I am sure Margaret was supremely unhappy in those surroundings.

It was a very pleasant dinner. Margaret was a quiet, unobtrusive hostess, and left most of the talking to her ebullient husband, who was prepared to speak of anything and everything. He seemed to know everyone. He had, he told me, many friends in the medical world: Professor This, Professor That. I must come down when one or other of them was at the house. I might find it useful to me . . . .

That was the connecting link in all his conversation. *Cui bono?* Who profits? And he made it plain that the only people entitled to any profit at all in this world—he did not assault the next—were Isaac Jacobi, his friends and relations.

From that day I became quite a regular visitor at the house. Margaret seemed to have taken a special fancy to me —perhaps she found me a change from Isaac's rather ostentatious business friends and their families. And curiously enough that first occasion was the only one on which I dined alone with them. Whether they had invited me by myself to try me out and see whether my manners and conversation conformed to the required standard I do not know; and I never had the courage afterwards to ask Margaret.

And the Isaac Jacobi I met and dined with in his own home was an entirely different person from the financial ogre whose picture was painted for me in such lurid colours in the beer gardens and cafés. He was almost humbly deferential to Margaret, yet always with the suggestion that he was master in his own house. And the obvious tight bond of affection between him and his two children was a pleasure to see. I could not believe that a man like this could be so black as people tried to make out.

Of course, he was intently interested in business and the making of profit. That struck me as natural. No man rises

as he has risen unless he has the attribute of weighing everything up to see if he can earn anything out of it. But he never talked 'shop' unless he was with business friends, and he was a good enough host never to let it get beyond bounds so that his other guests felt out in the cold. Nor had he the common failing of the self-made man in insisting on relating his life history to every new acquaintance. The information I gained was largely indirect, and particularly so about Margaret, until, in years to come, she was to tell me a great deal more that both confirmed and amplified what I already knew. So step by step I began to discover the answer to the question that puzzled me: How came these two to marry?

## CHAPTER III

### MARGARET

THE KEY of suffering was struck in the very opening bars of Margaret's life, and she was destined from the first, it seems, to go through the symphony of life returning ever to a sombre minor mood.

Her mother came of a solid Saxon family, a minor branch of an old, but impoverished, aristocratic line, who had turned their attention successfully to commerce on a restrained scale. There were no Isaac Jacobis in the von Zeihallt family tree. Memories of their illustrious past, as they thought it, were more treasured by them than the riches of the world, and though they engaged in trade they secretly despised it and railed at the hard fate which had driven them to it. Yet at the same time they held it in some regard, believing that it should be suffused by high principles and regarding with disfavour those who gained a living by other and less reputable methods.

It had been a tragedy to the family when Gertrude had run away and married Hans Kraeft. Hans Kraeft was a pianist with a far higher opinion of his talents than achievement warranted. Destined, as he believed, to rival Liszt and Rubinstein, he was none the less shiftless and lazy. The concert platform to which he aspired was always just beyond his reach. He was reduced to playing in small theatre orchestras and even in bars and beer cellars, and he never stayed long in one place, as much from an inborn urge to vagrancy as to the unwelcome attention of creditors. Yet he was fascinating, with rich, dark eyes and long, flowing hair, and the young Gertrude von Zeihallt fell an easy victim to him. Whether, when she eloped with him, he had seriously

intended marriage, is much open to doubt. There is nothing in his life, so far as I could trace, to suggest that he would ever contemplate contracting a bond so lasting. But marry Gertrude he did, and she spent her life travelling from place to place, fighting in each one an unequal battle with lodging-house keepers and trying to save some of her husband's paltry earnings from the tills of the bars in which Hans Kraeft spent the greater part of his time and his money.

Within a year of the marriage, Margaret was born. For the first eleven months of her life, she went from town to town, village to village, with her parents, an added embarrassment to their slender resources and an additional burden to her mother in particular. Gertrude had never been a very robust girl, and she had been brought up in an atmosphere of comparative wealth. No life less suited to her than this of her husband's could have been imagined. Her confinement had sapped the strength that was already failing under the stress of existence with Kraeft. Three weeks before Margaret's first birthday, Gertrude died, worn out by her struggle against odds that were too much for her.

Hans Kraeft was now faced with a problem that must have presented difficulties even to his powers of evasion and temporization. But his ingenuity did not fail him. He wrapped the infant Margaret up warmly, and deposited her on the doorstep of a hospital, with a note explaining that she was to be returned to the von Zeihallt family; and he enclosed a few marks as a contribution towards her fare. This last was the most astonishing detail of the whole business. He also wrote to Gertrude's mother, telling her of her daughter's death and asking her to look after the grandchild. Having done all this—it was in a small north German town—Kraeft slipped over the frontier into Denmark and was heard of no more. Margaret does not know to this day whether her father is alive or dead.

The von Zeihallt family were not at all pleased at this summary treatment. They tried, unavailingly, to trace the

absconded son-in-law. But they had also a strong family pride. The only alternative to their accepting the care of Margaret was that the child should be brought up in a home for destitute children; and they could not contemplate that even an unwanted cadet of their line should sink to such a fate.

Margaret was brought up by her grandmother and by one of her mother's sisters who had resolutely refused to marry. On the face of it, it might seem that Margaret's fortune had changed for the better. Her future, if Gertrude had lived, could not have been happy or held out any but the blackest prospects. In the shelter of the von Zeihallt home, she should find comfort and hope.

The von Zeihalts had other ideas, however. If family pride and unity impelled them to accept this disgraceful burden, they saw no reason for admitting the child to the full freedom of the family caste. From her earliest days, Margaret had it instilled in her that the daughter of a von Zeihallt who had sunk to marrying a wandering musician was only an honorary member of the family, and it was made quite plain to her that her name was Kraeft, not von Zeihallt. Her aunt, Paula, who was primarily charged with Margaret's care, lost no opportunity of impressing on the growing child that she was not a true von Zeihallt and that it was an act of supreme charity and goodness, possible only to a von Zeihallt, that she had been admitted to the house at all.

As Margaret grew up she became more and more the slave of the household. Her status was indeterminate, being neither that of a member of the family, nor that of a servant. She went to school, a typical smalltown German dame school, with the daughter of the housekeeper, a widow with a girl a little older than Margaret, and she was given, as the year advanced, ever growing domestic responsibilities. But she did not enjoy any of the privileges of the servants. She received no pay of any kind for all she did—not even a few pfennige as pocket-money, nor did she have any share in the

annual gifts made to the servants, with a princely grace, by Heinrich von Zeihallt, the head of the family. She had her meals alone, since it was considered indecent that even so poor a von Zeihallt as she should stoop to feeding with menials.

Thus she was effectively screened from all sort of human contacts and grew up lonely, depressed, inhibited, and shy. The school she attended was small, the pupils being mainly the children of the humblest tradesmen and the better-off servants of the neighbourhood, and she found no friends among these, who held religiously aloof from her. Their parents felt they could not aspire to intimacy with a child who was, when all was said and done, a relative of the people in the big house. More than that, there was some mystery surrounding Margaret. It was generally accepted that she must be a bastard—and as such, quite unfit to mix with decent children, however poor they might be.

At fourteen, her schooling ceased. The von Zeihallts felt that duty could demand no more of them, and they had discharged their obligations to an even greater extent than was necessary to satisfy family honour. From then on, Margaret became the household drudge. Because she was what she was, things could be asked of her that could not be expected of servants. She rose earlier than they to see that they set about their duties at the proper hour. She retired later, so that she could make sure all were in bed and that the house had been properly locked up for the night. Sleep for her, at the age of fifteen and sixteen, when so much strain is being put upon the growing body, was something snatched, more often than not, between the chimes of midnight and the tolling of four or five o'clock on the grandfather clock that stood on the landing. She marketed and sewed, and she was always expected to be available to attend to her aunt's wishes—whether they were to mix an egg-and-milk laced with brandy or read the current issue of the Roman Catholic newspaper which was Aunt Paula's only form of

literature. When guests came, Margaret was confined strictly to her room. It would never do for a von Zeihallt—or one in whose veins that sacred blood, however adulterated, flowed—to be mistaken for a servant, nor was it thinkable that she should sit at table with them.

Browbeaten, overworked, perpetually tired and strained to the limit of her strength, Margaret had little enough opportunity of developing a personality of her own, yet there must have been something of her vagabond father in her. Nothing made her content with her lot. She did not feel any gratitude for the von Zeihallts' treatment of her. On the contrary, she often reflected that life in an orphan's home could hardly have been worse, but might very probably have been better. At least she would not have suffered from a position that was neither one thing nor another, a status midway between that of a member of the family and that of a servant. She longed to be free. But she was tied. She had not even a trunk she could pack if she went away.

At sixteen, she was unable to quell her rebellious urges any longer. The von Zeihallts went away for their annual holiday to Switzerland, leaving Margaret to look after the house. The housekeeper had been dismissed now Margaret was considered capable of running the place herself and during these holidays the servants were allowed periods to go and visit their relatives. Margaret found herself alone with only an elderly cook and the second housemaid.

How easy, she thought, it would be to walk out now! Old Matilde the cook is as deaf as a post and quite out of the way in the basement, and as for Lotte, the housemaid, she was only a child and would not care what happened. And beyond was freedom.

The idea was exciting. It persisted. She found herself thinking of it at intervals throughout the day, until at last its attractions became irresistible. Next day, she decided—or just as soon as conditions seemed best—she would run away. There would be some sort of a job for her somewhere,

but that did not trouble her much. In her present mood even starvation seemed better than a life that had become a prison.

Very early next morning she got together a few of the things that were indisputably hers. She wished to take nothing with her that the von Zeihallts might feel was theirs. Then she sat down and wrote a note to her aunt, explaining what she was doing, thanking the von Zeihallts for what they had done for her, and begging that they might not try to bring her back.

It was a very desperate adventure. She had no money whatsoever, no friend's house to go to, no idea of what she was going to do. Experienced beyond her years in some things, she was, as yet, entirely unsophisticated, with no knowledge at all of the outside world. To all intents and purposes she might just as well have been nurtured in a very rigorous convent. But for the moment, it was only the spirit of rebellion that gripped her. Practical difficulties there might and would be, but they could be faced in their own good time. The urge to escape was paramount.

Yet for all that, she glanced a little regretfully round the small, sparsely furnished room that had been hers for so long. It was little more than a cell, with just enough space for the rickety old wooden bed with its flock mattress, a table with a cracked basin and a handleless jug in it, and a single cane-seated chair. The coldness of the bare boards was hardly relieved by the aged strip of rush matting by the side of the bed—a piece so old that it had a large hole in the centre. This was, after all, the only place in which she had ever been able to find a little peace and rest during all those grim years.

She went about her early morning duties as though preparing for an ordinary day. There was quite enough to do, even though the family was away, for the ways of Aunt Paula were unpredictable and she might decide to return unannounced at any moment—and she would expect

to find everything ready for her reception. That was one of the things which made speed in her enterprise essential.

At the usual time she went out to the shops. She carried her shopping bag, in accordance with custom, for though the house was large and its occupants well-to-do, she had always been expected to go marketing and haggle over prices in just the same way as any little clerk's wife. But this time the bag was not empty. It contained those few pathetic clothes of hers to which alone she felt she had any right, and also a little food—enough to last her, with care, for a day.

For the rest of the day she walked, following the main road north-eastwards. She had no intention of remaining where she was known. In the afternoon she ate a little of her food, and at night she slept in a field, under the lee of some ramshackle farm structure. Next day she set out again and by midday she came to the little town of Feldbach.

By now she was in a state bordering on panic. She had walked fast and far. She had little enough food. And she did not know what to do next. There were moments when she almost regretted having taken this desperate step, but that mood did not last long. Nothing could be worse than the slavery she had endured.

It was obvious she would have to get a job of some kind—but what? She had no qualifications except domestic ones, and though those were all most women were likely to have in those days, she had no references. She knew enough from having assisted her aunt to engage new servants to realize how much a reference meant. The position, in her low state, seemed impossible.

It was her very inexperience of the ways of the world that saved her. A more sophisticated girl in similar circumstances would have probably invented some story and tried to lie her way into getting employment. But lying never occurred to Margaret. In desperation she had walked into the doors of a nursing home she had chanced upon and asked the maid who answered the door if there were any vacancies for a maid

of some kind. The girl had nodded. For once, Margaret had luck on her side, and after a brief wait she was taken in to see the matron.

The matron eyed her in some bewilderment. She was not used, in the first place, to girls who came to the door asking for jobs without having been sent by the registry office. And Margaret puzzled her. The girl's hands were work-worn enough; she looked competent. But she was definitely not of the servant class. Her way of speech, her bearing, suggested something quite different.

"You have references?" she asked. That, she thought, would clear matters up.

Margaret, faced with the very crisis she had expected, shook her head. She looked at the matron, who appeared a sympathetic, understanding woman, and then, quite quietly and undramatically, she told the truth. She had run away from intolerable conditions. Briefly she sketched in the background.

And once again luck was on Margaret's side.

"So." The matron nodded. Feldbach was not so very far from the von Zeihallts' home. "I have heard of you. Gossip travels far in these god-forsaken places." The matron had come from Berlin. "You are the von Zeihallt drudge, as they call you. Well, I do not know what will happen to me if the police come and make a scene here, but I will take the risk and give you a chance."

Margaret gasped. She had not expected this. "You will?"

Again the matron nodded. "Yes. You have courage, my child. I am not speaking of this running away, of which I am bound to disapprove, but it is done and nothing I can do will alter it. I have no power to send you back to the von Zeihallts, and if I turn you from my doors, you will only go somewhere else and probably fare much worse. No, my child. I am talking of your courage in telling me the truth. It gives me confidence in you. You can start here as a junior

ward maid. The work is hard—but you are used to that and will not mind it. You will sleep in the same room as Maria, the maid who let you in. I do not think the conditions are too bad. I will give you a uniform and your wages will be five marks a month and, of course, your board."

Margaret thanked her breathlessly. She did not care how hard the work was, nor did she mind if she had to sleep on bare planks. She had won her freedom—that was the thing that mattered. And five marks a month! At the then rate of exchange that was about four shillings in English money, but it was wealth to Margaret, who had never handled any money in her life except what she had been given for housekeeping and of which she had to give the strictest account to her aunt. Her life seemed to her to have passed from midnight to noon at a single bound.

The life of a ward maid is never easy. In a nursing home in a small German town in those days, it was exceedingly onerous. But Margaret was happy. She had now a definite status, however humble it might be, and for the first time she found friendship and companionship. Maria took to her at once, and the matron was always kind, though very aloof and encouraging no sort of intimacy with her subordinates.

For several weeks Margaret waited, as it were, for the sounds of pursuit, but none came. The von Zeihallts had, presumably, shut the whole unsavoury episode of Margaret Kraeft out of their aristocratic lives.

I have always thought that it would have been interesting to be present when the von Zeihallts returned from their holiday and found Margaret's note awaiting them, and years afterwards I asked Margaret whether she had ever had any news of what occurred.

She laughed. "No. But I can imagine their horror and disgust and then their supercilious decision to cut me right out of their lives. Perhaps they were relieved. I should have been a terrible problem to them later on. They would have

had to have married me to someone, but who? I couldn't have married anyone they could really approve of, and they wouldn't have been able to think of a further adulteration of the von Zeihallts' blood. Personally I think I saved them a lot of trouble, and Granny, who was a shrewd old thing in her way, probably realized it. But I did see Aunt Paula again," she added, with a reminiscent smile.

"Oh?" I prompted her eagerly.

"Yes. It was in Lausanne some years after I was married, and I was sitting in the lounge waiting for Isaac—I forgot where he'd been and it doesn't matter anyway—when who should walk in but Paula von Zeihallt—rather older, of course, but still unmistakably Aunt Paula and as upright as a ramrod. I think I must have had the devil in me that day. I waited till she had settled herself and I noticed she was reading the same old Catholic newspaper. Then I went up to her and said: 'Aunt Paula.'

"She almost shot out of her chair and stared at me as though I were a ghost, though really it wasn't so very many years since she'd seen me.

"'I beg your pardon?' she said, trying to recover her poise.

"'I'm Margaret,' I said. 'Surely you remember me? Margaret Jacobi now by the way.'

"She stared at me quite speechless. Then she drew herself up.

"'I beg you not to speak to me,' she said, and then her curiosity overcame her dignity. 'Did you say your name was Jacobi?' she asked.

"'Yes,' I replied. 'My husband is Isaac Jacobi, the industrialist—you may have heard of him.'

"'Oh!' She grew very icy. 'So you've married a Jew.' She said it as though what she meant was 'well, we always knew you'd go wrong'. I'm afraid I was very rude. I couldn't help it. I laughed so loudly that people in the lounge stared at me and poor Aunt Paula buried herself

in her paper—which she got hold of upside-down, and that made me worse. Then I realized from the stir that I was making an exhibition of myself and I fled from the room. I'm afraid I've none of the von Zeihallt poise," she concluded reflectively.

"I should like to have seen that little scene," I commented. "It would have appealed to me."

"So you see," she said, "they did not kill the fatted calf for their prodigal daughter. I don't know what Grandfather thought of it, but probably Aunt Paula never told him. She would think the whole thing too utterly disgusting."

I laughed. Yes, I would certainly have liked to have been there. The thought that this skeleton in the cupboard had made so good a match for herself must have shocked the von Zeihallt mind to its very foundations. That word Margaret had used—'disgusting'—would have been the very one she would have employed.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARRIAGE

IT WAS while she was at the nursing home that Margaret met Isaac Jacobi. He had come there for a small operation and had been forced to remain several weeks. At that time, he was working up his business with all the energy of a fanatical young man who sees his goal clearly before him. He worked day and night. The result was that his recovery from the intervention was not as rapid as it should have been, and the doctors had prescribed a complete rest for a few weeks.

As a rule, ward maids do not come into very close contact with the patients in nursing homes, particularly the more expensive ones like that in which Margaret was employed. But she was already in a rather special position. The matron had kept a close eye on her and noticed that she was, as might have been expected, well above the average in intelligence and, furthermore, had a sense of responsibility far beyond her years. There was nothing very surprising about the latter. Since her early teens, Margaret had practically been in sole charge of a fair-sized household, and organizing and supervising had become automatic to her. The matron—a Fräulein Jener—decided Margaret was too good to remain a mere ward maid, and had encouraged her to spend a little time each day with the nurses, picking up the rudiments of the art. The home was the private, individual property of Fräulein Jener and it may have been that she saw in Margaret someone who, with the requisite knowledge and experience, might make an efficient deputy, of which she stood in great need.

During his weeks in the home, Isaac Jacobi saw a great deal of Margaret, and, like the matron, was rather impressed by her quiet confidence and competence. He was used to weighing people up—that is one of the first attributes of a business man—and he decided that Margaret would make the perfect manager of a home. He arrived at this conclusion in the first place without any personal implications attached to it. That was his habit: he would automatically assess a person and then place him in some category of usefulness.

Later, he became more interested in Margaret as a person. If she was not beautiful, there was something definitely pleasing about her appearance, and her general air of self-reliance in her job added to it. Isaac began to consider her as a possible housekeeper for his new house he had bought in the suburbs of Hanover. She was young, of course—very young—and that might cause complications in a variety of ways. Servants might not take kindly to working under the direction of a girl still in her teens. Still, there was no harm in trying.

About three weeks before he left the home, he asked Margaret if she would like another position.

"I have never thought of it," she replied. "I have not been here so very long, after all, and the fräulein has been very good to me. It has never entered my head."

"I see. Well, why not think it over? Listen, Margaret. I am a business man and I am accustomed to valuing things. As a rule I value things from my own standpoint and buy in the cheapest market to sell in the dearest, which is the principle of all good, profitable trade, is it not? And I take that view in regard to labour and employees as well. But today I am going to try and look at things from your point of view and give you a little advice."

"Yes, *mein Herr?*"

"You are a very competent girl, Margaret. I don't think you realize just how competent you are. When you are in

the room everything goes smoothly, and even the sisters look to you—though they don't admit it—to organize the work in the ward. But what is your position here? You are a ward maid, are you not?"

"Yes."

"And your salary? Forgive me for being inquisitive. My motives are quite honest."

"Five marks a month."

He stared at her in astonishment. He had expected to hear her name a trifling sum, but nothing so low as that. Even he, with his already well developed genius for getting things cheap, had not known that labour could be bought for such wages.

"Five marks a month!" he exclaimed. "But that is nothing at all. It is preposterous."

"It is more than I have ever had before," she said, speaking the truth, but in a roundabout way.

"That does not justify it. The matron certainly knows how to apply my principles and can beat me at my own game. Why, from what little I have seen of you, I should imagine you were worth at least five times that sum to her every week. But let that pass. It is not really important from the point of view of what I have to say. I am trying to show you, Margaret, that you're wasting your time here and losing opportunities of getting on. What you need is a job in which you can exercise that capacity for organization you have. You are utterly wasted here, as a ward maid—and what chances of promotion have you?"

"I am very contented here," she returned, wondering why he was talking in this strain to her. "Fräulein Jener is very kind to me, and I have good food. The work is no harder than that I have been used to."

"I don't doubt any of that," persisted Isaac. "But there is no reason for thinking that you might not be happier elsewhere and do much better for yourself."

"Perhaps the time for that has not yet come."

He did not pursue the subject further at that time. Certainly Margaret was not precisely an ambitious girl. Most girls in her position would have grasped eagerly at the merest suggestion of getting away into something better—and especially when a man in Jacobi's position took an interest. But he did not know the background of Margaret's life.

The conversation had puzzled her. She could see neither rhyme nor reason for it. It was the mere truth that she had never contemplated leaving, either then or at some future date. This was an oasis from her troubles and, to her, a very pleasant one compared with what she had become accustomed to in her earlier years. More than that, she felt she was under a debt of gratitude to Fräulein Jener—a debt she would never be able to repay.

But Jacobi was not the man to be put off by the somewhat dense lack of ambition of a girl—as he thought it. He had made up his mind that Margaret was exactly the woman he wanted to run his home, for he had always visualized his home conducted with as much efficiency in its way as he insisted upon in his own business. Nothing appalled him more than waste of time, money, effort, or materials, and they disgusted him as much in domestic as in industrial affairs. Margaret, he had decided, had just those qualities which would make that new home of his what he wanted it to be. He had never yet failed to attain what he had decided to get, and he therefore fully intended to take up the subject again.

He did, with very great persistence. Eventually he made Margaret what he called a 'firm offer'—though she had little enough idea of the meaning of that business phrase. It would certainly never have occurred to her that people might make offers and not mean them. At first she did not know what to do about it. She felt like rejecting it without considering it, and he, reading her thoughts, promptly increased the pressure. At last, seeing that she was becoming quite confused, he suggested she should think it over.

No amount of thought helped her. It was true the job looked attractive enough. The money was, on her scale, immense wealth. She would be to all intents and purposes her own mistress. All that seemed too good to be true. Yet even in the short time she had been at the home the ties of loyalty and gratitude had grown strong. With her inborn directness and honesty, she resolved to ask Fräulein Jener's opinion.

The matron listened attentively to what she had to say, making no comment beyond, now and again, a slight flickering smile.

"And what do you think of the offer, Margaret?" she asked.

"I don't know." Margaret shook her head miserably.

The matron laughed. "You are a funny girl, Margaret. Let me say this first. You first won my confidence by your frankness and now you have done it again. I am very much indebted to you. Do you know what nine hundred and ninety-nine girls out of a thousand would have done?"

Again Margaret shook her head.

"Accepted the offer and packed their trunks at once, leaving me without a word. You don't seem to realize what's been offered you—but how should you? You know so little of the world. Listen, my child. This is a job that many a woman twice your age and more, with a lifetime's experience behind them, would look upon as the summit of her ambition. Herr Jacobi is a very well-to-do man, and if all accounts are true, he is going to be very much richer, so you may be in a first-class position for life." Once more that smile flickered over her lips. She gave Margaret a sharp look. "Take it, my girl, and don't be a fool."

Even then, Margaret felt a little helpless.

"But I owe you so much, Fräulein Jener. You took me in, and I don't think I ought to leave you."

"Don't be a fool," repeated the matron. "I should never be able to pay you what Herr Jacobi can. There are no

chances here, or even in the nursing profession, like this. I admit I'll be sorry to lose you—you're already of great use here, but don't let that bother you. We got on pretty well before you came, and I expect we shall manage to when you've gone."

"Thank you, Fräulein. I'm glad I've been of some use to you. You definitely advise me to accept?"

"Most decidedly."

Margaret did not manage to see Isaac Jacobi again that day, but before she went to sleep she told Maria all about it. She was surprised at the chuckles that came from Maria's bed in the dark.

"What's amusing you, Maria?" she asked.

"You, Margaret. Why does a man like Herr Jacobi choose a housekeeper of your age?"

"Because he thinks I can do the job, I suppose."

Maria chuckled again, a little more suggestively. "The question is: What job? You go in and win, Margaret. I would. Don't you mind what people say?"

Light dawned on Margaret. In those days she was very innocent. She felt herself blushing in the dark, and only just prevented herself from pulling the blankets over her head.

"Oh, Maria!" Margaret exclaimed. "I never thought of that."

"You wouldn't." And Maria laughed so loudly, that the matron, who slept in the next room, rapped on the wall to impose silence.

Margaret did not say anything to Jacobi when she saw him early the next morning, though he waited with obvious expectation. First, she wanted to see Fräulein Jener again, and at last the opportunity came.

"Yes, Margaret, what is it now?" she asked a little impatiently, feeling that, after all, she was not the girl's guardian.

"I've been thinking, Fräulein—do you think it would be quite *right* for me to accept Herr Jacobi's offer?"

This time the matron did not smile. She laughed joyously.

"Margaret, one of these days I hope you'll grow up. I suppose Maria's been talking to you, and that's what she was laughing about last night. Well, if it was, I forgive her now, for you've made me do the same. Don't you worry, little child. I've been talking about you to Herr Jacobi this morning, and—well, I've an idea you won't be his housekeeper very long."

Margaret was about to say something but the matron checked her.

"Now be off," she said with mock sternness. "You haven't got all day to waste in talking, nor have I. There's a new patient coming into No. 7, and I want you to see to it for me. She'll be here at five-thirty—a surgical case."

Four weeks later, Margaret left for her new job. She felt a little frightened. Not only was she going out into something entirely new and unfamiliar, but she suddenly realized, as she walked to the station, accompanied by Maria, granted permission as a special favour, that this would be the first time in her life she had travelled on a train by herself. The prospect was far more alarming than that of the coming work.

"Never mind," said Maria, to whom she confided her fears. "You'll find someone to look after you. I came here once from Königsberg, where I'd been to see an aunt who was dying, and I had to change five times, but I always found someone to carry my bag and show me the way."

Margaret gave her a wide-eyed look, at which Maria went into hysterical laughter, almost dropping the bag she was carrying.

"Oh, Margaret, you are funny," she said.

It did not take long for Margaret to settle down in her new job. She had had domestic details so woven into her that they were a part of her very being. Isaac had engaged two servants on the recommendation of a friend: one, a cook, a woman of thirty-two, the other, a house-parlourmaid, a

girl of twenty-two. Neither seemed anxious at first to act under the directions of this rather superior-looking girl, barely eighteen, who had come from some mysterious part of unknown Germany. But Margaret took no notice of their attitude to her. She was quite used to dealing with older women, and she soon let them see who was mistress. More than that, she showed them both that she knew quite as much about their work as they did themselves—and this, to the cook, came as a sobering surprise. Once the relationship had been clearly established, and Margaret had proved to them, quietly but firmly, that she was there because she was an expert, and not for any other reason they might have suspected, everything went smoothly. Isaac, entertaining his business friends, nodded contentedly to himself as the well-ordered dinners went their way, and congratulated himself not so much on his good luck at having encountered Margaret by a pure chance—for if he had not been taken ill while travelling he would never have gone to a nursing home in Feldbach—but on his acumen in summing up Margaret's capabilities.

For a little while he took it all for granted, and, absorbed in his own affairs, saw very little of Margaret, but the many congratulations he received, especially from his friends' wives, on the efficiency of his home and the genius of his housekeeper, re-aroused his interest in her as a person. He sought her out and talked to her. He missed her when she could not find time to be with him. Within six months of her entering the house as his servant, Fräulein Jener's prophecy came true. Margaret was no longer Isaac Jacobi's housekeeper, but his wife.

The wedding had not been without difficulties. Isaac's friends and relations were dubious of the wisdom of his marrying a Gentile, particularly if there should be children. But they could do little against his determination. On the other hand, Margaret refused to abandon the faith in which she had been brought up. It was the one thing on which

she had had the courage to resist her aunt. The von Zeihallts as a family were staunch Lutherans, and the grandmother had insisted that Margaret must become a member of the Lutheran Church. Aunt Paula had, in her day, created a family scandal by suddenly turning Roman Catholic. It was the one blot on the behaviour of one who had stood all her life so strongly for all the traditions of the family.

Agreement was reached, however, when Margaret accepted the principle that any children should be instructed in the Jewish faith. To Isaac Jacobi, a Jew by descent, a Jew in conduct, but not a practising Jew in religion, the matter was of slight importance and one on which concession might easily be made. Jew, Catholic, Protestant; Muslim, Buddhist, Confucian: what did it matter? In the modern world, he contended, there were more important things than religion, and it might be that in due course the revolution that had changed the whole course of men's lives by replacing manual power by machines, abolishing distance, and opening the path to plenty, might bring forth a new philosophy and ethic which would replace creeds born under conditions very widely different from those of the twentieth century.

They were married in August, 1907, when Margaret was just eighteen. Isaac Jacobi gave his age as thirty-two. In 1910, the elder child was born—the boy Werner. Two years later, in 1912, the family was increased by the girl Else.

## CHAPTER V

### CALM BEFORE STORM

THERE were twenty years of calm and quiet happiness before Margaret. It seemed as though, when she married, she had cast off all the trials and misery that had entwined her during her early years. The present was atoning for the past in a way that was not merely just but generous.

At the time of the wedding, Isaac was by no means at the summit of his career, but for a man in the early thirties he was certainly doing well. He was already a director of the company he had first entered as a technical salesman—a working director, to whom the initiative was rapidly passing. The managing director was old and his ideas obsolete. He failed to see the need of the new methods that Isaac was constantly putting forward—ideas that, in many cases, seemed to him to border on the line that separates honesty from trickery. But Isaac was not deterred. One by one his ideas were accepted, and his fellow directors placed increasing reliance upon him. Isaac lost no chance of damning the managing director by faint praise and extolling himself by inference. The scheme worked well. Within fourteen months of his marriage he had replaced the older man, who had become completely discredited. Less than six months later, he was elected chairman as well. The control of policy and methods was now, to all intents and purposes, in his hands. He pushed forward boldly, swaying his board and winning its support by a studied, subtle mixture of persuasion, flattery, and downright dictation. They did not interfere with him much. What had they to worry about when the accounts showed so clearly expanding sales, rising profits, and growing markets? Jacobi, they said among

a general meeting, he would use his majority holding of shares to carry his own proposals.

At last, they gave way. They had, in fact, no alternative. By the end of the year, the title was changed to the Jacobi Engineering Company, and Isaac had placed himself in the position at which he had always aimed. He made a new issue of shares that brought in large sums of money from the public, though still leaving him with absolute control. He put three of his yes-men on the Board. The reorganized concern was Jacobi in both name and fact.

No longer were there any brakes on development. The business expanded very rapidly, and by 1914 Jacobi was already a wealthy man. He was beginning to look about for fresh fields to conquer. Other business men feared him, for though they had deplored his methods of gaining control when they had spoken in public, in private they admired and envied his utterly single-minded ambition. He allowed nothing to stand in his way and combined, with a readiness to adopt any course, a shrewd knowledge of how far he could go within the loose safeguards of German company law.

The war of 1914 created entirely new problems, but Jacobi tackled them with characteristic energy. He left nothing to chance. Unlike most Germans, he saw no prospect of a quick victory for the Central Powers. Seeing further than most men, he believed that, with the resources of the world marshalled against them, Germany could not gain victory in the field; and he realized also that more and more the question of victory would be a matter of supplies rather than men. By various means he forced his way into the inner councils of industry. The Army could not touch him in the influential position he attained. He worked zealously for the organization of German industry for war, and saw to it that the Jacobi Company obtained the share of orders that he thought proper. In so doing he was not alone, either in Germany or elsewhere. While there is war, there will continue to be profit in it; and while there is profit

in it, there will always be those eager to take it. Once again it is the system that is more to blame than the individuals who benefit by it.

Margaret knew little of all these things. Her husband's business affairs were a mysterious background to his life—a background she had neither the wish nor the knowledge to understand. She made contact with it in oblique ways, as when she was so often hostess to his business friends and their families. But she did not talk shop with him. He preferred it like that. It was as though there was a dichotomy in his character—a duality to which I have already referred. In business, he had ruthlessness, a lack of principle, and complete egotism—qualities that may be undesirable in the absolute ethical sense but are none the less essential to outstanding success in finance and industry. In his home life, he was generous, unselfish, sincere, loving, and lovable. The mysteries and apparent contradictions of human nature are beyond understanding.

During those years, those eventful years that led through the mirage-Utopia of 1911–1914, the war of 1914–1918, and the nightmare fantasy of the 1920s, Margaret knew little but a tale of increasing prosperity and ease. In some ways, these were the halcyon days of her life, a high, early summer that was to be followed by a dark, chilling winter which more than compensated for them. Between 1910 and 1925, they moved three times, on each occasion to a larger and more magnificent house, till finally they came to harbour in the modernistic place in which I first met the Jacobis—a house designed by the great Mendelssohn himself and one to which the first apostles of the cult of functionalism came in humble, adoring pilgrimage.

She was happy enough in those days, attending to the children, whom both of them adored, and running the home with the competent efficiency that had first attracted Isaac's attention to her. Werner and Else were handsome children. They gave little enough indication of their half-

Jewish parentage, and the blondeness of Else made one suspect that Isaac's descent could not be purely Semitic. And that very doubt, which amounts almost to a certainty on genetic principles, helps to make her subsequent tragedy all the more poignant. But that still lay years ahead.

Even the war, with the hardships it brought to the mass of the German people, as the throttle hold of the British blockade grew ever tighter, made comparatively little difference to the Jacobi household. He belonged to a privileged class—a class that exists in all countries at all times and under all systems, and that flourishes especially in times of war, or seems to do so because the contrast between it and the majority is thrown into greater relief. True, food was scarce, and Margaret could no longer preside over the sumptuous Germanic banquets with which she delighted to entertain her husband's friends. It was difficult to get clothes for herself and the children. There were all manner of shortages. But they never became really serious. Even when supplies were at their shortest, there was always something of nearly everything for the favoured few, among whom Isaac had made quite sure that he held an established place.

Isaac's shrewdness extended to every detail of his career. He avoided the mistake of becoming identified, as so many self-made business men do, with this or that political party. He was concerned only with being on good terms with those in authority, and their political views—provided they were not violently communistic and socialist. Yet even that wise aloofness was not to save him when the great crisis came.

In the years following the 1918 Armistice, Isaac suffered only one period of serious misgiving. That was in 1919. To the world and to many it seemed that Germany was in a state of revolution. Old ideas were being swept away and new ones substituted. In February, 1919, the Weimar Republic was constituted. For the first time for centuries,

that agglomeration of states known as the German Empire was without a crowned head. On the face of it the revolution was sweeping. Here was democracy carried to the ultimate, a complete reaction from the autocracy that had, for so long, been the pattern of German government, no less in the empire Bismarck created than in the historic states that composed it.

The shadow of the Russian Revolution was still strong and long. It was but a couple of years since Nicholas II had toppled from his throne and, in the eyes of western Europe, the wild beast of atheistic communism had been unchained. Was Germany, too, to be another victim of that savage, all-destroying marauder?

At first finance was alarmed, even though the majority of its leaders had taken good care—as Isaac had—to see, from 1915 onwards, that a very considerable part of their resources had been safely laid by in neutral banks. But the alarm did not last long. If the body had been changed, the chassis remained the same. Scarcely a judge, scarcely a civil servant, lost his post. The official machine still ground in the same old way, and those who, like Isaac, were close to the inner councils, realized that the power of the country still lay (as the world has since learnt to its appalling cost) in the old ruling caste. So long as property and interest were safe, that was all that mattered. And, as events proved, the possessing classes were not merely to be safe but were to become the favoured darlings of tragic conditions.

Of the way in which Isaac turned those years to his profit, acting in concert with his colleagues, I have already written, as I have of the almost meteoric rise of the business in the international market. And all this time, Isaac was increasing his interests here, there, and everywhere, adding anything to his resources that looked as though it might, either now or later, yield a profit.

It seems strange that the almost fantastic events of those stirring and eventful years should have been no more than

a hardly appreciated background to Margaret. To her, the home was the boundary of life. She was happy there, with her children and her friends and her husband's friends. She had no interest in politics or the world at large. She travelled with Isaac when he took his annual holiday of four or five weeks (usually combining a business objective with it), but she did not travel for the sake of travel. To her, with stormy memories of her girlhood, happiness in life was represented by the peace and security which she had found in such completeness. That outside events, the steady march of world affairs, the fiery words of politicians and the scheming of generals and financiers, should ever shatter that peace and that security never even occurred to her. It was simply that her experience of life had been so very limited, and that, as a child, she had not had the faculty of intellectual curiosity cultivated in her. She was leading the full life of a woman as she saw it: rearing her children, minding her husband, looking after his home and gracing it. What more could be asked of her?

Yes, it is very difficult to realize her isolation and self-sufficiency. I remember how, in later years, when she came to England her ignorance of German affairs almost staggered me. She had lived in Germany all her life, I only a comparatively few years. Yet when I might ask her if she remembered this or that, or could tell me a German's view of some particular historical event, she would shake her head.

"I don't know anything about it," she would say. "I read about these things in the papers, of course, but they were remote and unreal. They happened in a world I did not know. What they said and did in the Reichstag was as far away and unimportant to me as what they said and did in Congress in Washington. I had my home and my children"—she would sigh—"and that was what I wanted and all a woman should want. Home, children, and a good husband! I had all three. I don't think myself that women

have any place in being lawyers, doctors and going into politics. But perhaps I'm wrong and that's just due to my ignorance. I'm probably behind the times. I've seen a good deal of the world these last few years—and the world at its worst at that—and the more I learn the more I'm convinced that women who give up the shelter of the home and all its joys for the competition of the professions and trade and so on are making the greatest mistake of all."

Some may dismiss that point of view as a form of selfishness and escapism, and yet I believe that there are many women who, if they allowed themselves to speak their secret thoughts and were not so fascinated by the desire to be fashionably modern, would agree with it. But it is, after all, only a point of view. Today there are few of the younger women of this country who cannot make a direct comparison between employment—whether in the Services, in the factory, or in the office—and home life, and for the first time a mass judgment based on experience may be made. Yet all these things are coloured by the personal equation. There was Margaret savagely brought up at a time when she most needed love and care; and it may be that then an idealized conception of the very word 'home' with its connotations of comfort and protection and peace—above all, peace—may have been born in her to be one of the strongest threads holding the fabric of her personality. She found happiness at last with her husband and her children. And when tragedy came—tragedy long drawn out, with each act holding some new and more crippling disaster—she was able to look back on that home as a paradise she had once known, a paradise now denied to her as Eden was to Eve. Her nostalgia must have been almost unbearable.

Margaret is one of those women to whom home and the domestic virtues are the summit of existence. There is a place—a great and honoured place in the world for them. It is they who give the world the cream of the new generation. But there are other women to whom home is nothing but a

prison, to whom life is an urgent quest in which security and routine are dangerous ambushes. There is room for them, too. It is one of the lessons we must learn that human beings are individuals and that we cannot grade them by their size and shape like the shot falling from a shot tower.

Since she took these views and lived a life of almost monastic isolation from the world—an isolation all the more complete because it was voluntary and desired, and this brought no reaction for escape—that she, least of all, could have anticipated the storm that was blowing up—a storm that was to engulf a great nation, then Europe, and finally the world, and leave behind the wreckage of human lives and happiness, human hopes and ambitions, like the uprooted trees in the path of the hurricane.

All Margaret could see in those days was the mellowing of her home, like vintage port in the wood, and the steady, healthy growth of her two children. She saw Werner progress from boyhood to youth, from youth to early manhood, studious, affectionate, with his father's courage and persistence softened and rounded off by his mother's more pacific traits. She saw Else grow into a gracious girl, one who echoed in a different key the domestic disposition of her mother—the key of a younger, freer, generation. There was nothing of what is called the typical modern girl about Else. She had been too close to her mother, and had too much of her mother in her, to dream of the things that obsessed most of her generation. And she was not a rare exception, even in the Germany of the 1920s, which has so often been depicted by those who saw no more than the vice-rackets of Berlin, as a land of looseness, debauchery, and sin committed in the name of freedom. The normal is not news, as any journalist will point out; and it is the fate of the Elses of the world, the women who do not seek notoriety, that their multitude goes unnoticed and unrecorded.

It was 1928 when I met them all. Else was just on sixteen, the age at which her mother ran away from her unhappy

home. Werner was eighteen and already at the university, where he would spend a few years before coming to assist his father. He had the gift of tongues, given to a few men, and he was studying languages. They were a happy family, among whom probably only Isaac turned any eye to the portents of the future. And he might well study them.

The halcyon days were drawing to an end. The markets of the world were soon to collapse, and the grim disease of mass unemployment was about to spread and multiply like a cancer in the industrial societies. Conditions were to become desperate, and Germany was to try a remedy more desperate than the malady.

But few thought of all that in 1928, at any rate in Germany. There was still prosperity after the lean, black years. The mark was a mark again. The *hausfrau* could take out her shopping basket to the market in the certainty that she could find the goods to fill it and have the money to do so. The world was buying German goods. Isaac Jacobi pored over his accounts with satisfaction, noting the rising profits, particularly in foreign currency. The artisan felt that his job was sure and his wages steady.

All seemed right with the world.

## CHAPTER VI

### FATE BEGINS TO STRIKE

ELSE WAS not a society girl in the usual sense, though she had more than ample opportunity of being one had she so desired. The gay life of parties and dances, dinners and theatres, which attracts the majority of girls, held little appeal for her. But she had been to an expensive boarding school and had made several friends there, and every year she went to visit them in turn, while they spent holidays in the Jacobis' house.

It was in 1929, when she was seventeen, that she went on her annual trip to Baden-Baden to stay for three weeks or more with her friend Matilde Grosskreutz, her best and closest friend. Her departure from her home was the beginning of the tragedy that, from then on, was to strike again and again at the Jacobis and to reserve its hardest blows for the one least able to bear them and certainly the least deserving—Margaret.

Else wrote regularly during these periods when she was away—quiet, affectionate letters to her mother, in which she recounted, with an almost naïve confidence, all the little details of her life. It is not so long since Margaret showed me a packet of rather faded papers tied together with a piece of purple ribbon.

"One of my greatest treasures," she said. "I have lost many things, often through carelessness. But these I have never allowed to leave me."

"What are they?" I asked. I admit I was not over interested in the sentimental memories of an ageing woman. "Love letters from Isaac?"

She shook her head. "No. Do you know Isaac never wrote me a love letter in his life? He would write every day when he was away on his business trips, but they were always more like reports of progress. They were affectionate enough, but no one could call them love letters. More often than not they were typed by Hans Greiffel, the secretary he always took with him. And I can't imagine even Don Juan getting romantic when he was dictating to Hans. Poor Hans! They tell me he was beaten up by the Nazis and left dying at the corner of a Berlin street.

"No," she went on after a pause, "these were the letters Else wrote me when she went to Baden-Baden that year when everything began. She always wrote to me every day, and at one time I had to burn everything she had ever written, starting from her first day at boarding school. It nearly broke my heart when I had to destroy so many of them. I kept these because—well, because they mark the end of an epoch. They were the end of her happiness and mine."

She stared into the fire in silence. I did not interrupt her reverie. Memories are sacred things that the voice of the stranger—for even one's closest friend is a stranger to one's memories—should not profane them. Life, after all, is nothing but an amalgam of memories, some sweet, some bitter, and not a few indifferent. It is only the coward or the sluggard who says that he remembers nothing.

I could imagine her reading and re-reading those early letters, in which Else recounted the little details of the journey, her arrival, the welcome she had been given by the Grosskreutz family, who were associated in some way with Isaac in business. Else and Matilde were like sisters, Margaret told me. And I can see Margaret pausing over one ~~that had~~, when she first received it, aroused all her very strongly developed maternal desire to protect and succour. Else had written that she was feeling unwell. She did not think it was serious, but Herr Grosskreutz had insisted on her seeing their new family doctor, Otto Wetzel. He was a

charming young man, not yet thirty and very well connected, and quite brilliant. Everybody predicted a most successful career for him.

Otto Wetzel!

No doubt when Margaret first read that name, it had made no special impression on her memory. Else wrote of so many people, giving their names, their family histories, the details of their appearance and behaviour. Margaret had shown me one or two of these letters—an honour of which I was properly conscious and acknowledged gratefully, though to me there is nothing less interesting than reading other people's letters, even those which authors and artists seem to write to their friends with an eye to subsequent publication in biographies. They are almost Victorian in their length and detail.

But later, that name Wetzel was to acquire a very special significance not only for Margaret but also for Isaac and Else herself.

That letter was succeeded by one in another hand: the writing of Matilde Grosskreutz. Else was too ill to write, but there was nothing very seriously wrong. It was some digestive disorder, but Dr. Wetzel would soon get her right. There was nothing for Margaret to worry about.

On receiving that letter, Margaret rang me up, asking me to come as soon as I could. In answer to my inquiry whether she was ill, she replied no, but Else was; and knowing nothing of Else's departure for Baden-Baden, I had a hurried word with my professor and went straight to the house.

Margaret took me into the little room she called her Retreat. It was a cosy little room, a complete contrast to those modern exhibition pieces, for it was furnished quietly with genuine antique English furniture—Sheraton and Hepplewhite, mostly. I expected to find Else propped against pillows in the armchair.

"I want to talk to you," said Margaret. "It's about Else, George." We were already close friends, the Jacobis and I.

"Hadn't I better see her first?" I returned. I hate having my examination befogged by the preconceived notions of affectionate parents. "Listen, Margaret. I am in a great hurry. We are very busy at the hospital and Professor Abnitz allowed me to come only because it was you and on the condition that I should be as quick as possible. Let me see Else, and we can talk later if necessary."

"Else isn't here," she answered, rather impatiently, as though I should have known. "She's in Baden-Baden."

"But you told me . . ." I cried.

"Yes, George. She's ill. I'm anxious. Matilde Grosskreutz has written to me because Else is too weak to write. Do you think you could manage to go down to see her?"

"But what is the matter? Is it as serious as all that?"

"Matilde says simply it's some digestive trouble and tells me not to worry."

"That's all right, if that's all it is." I was growing rather impatient. "I expect she's overeaten. A day or two on a low diet and she'll be quite fit again. There's nothing like a touch of the colic to make you feel weak. Is a doctor seeing her?"

"Yes. A Dr. Otto Wetzel. Matilde speaks very highly of him, and so did Else when she first wrote of her illness. But of course I know nothing about him. I'd feel more satisfied if you could go and see her."

"Margaret," I said, being as patient as I could. "I've no doubt Dr. Wetzel is a thoroughly competent man, otherwise Herr Grosskreutz wouldn't have called him in, and there's no reason in all the world why I should go chasing off to Baden-Baden. You know that if it was serious, I would pack my bag at once and Professor Abnitz wouldn't want to stop me. But this is absurd. If it gives you any satisfaction I'll look up Wetzel and find out what I can about him. But I have absolutely no right to go butting into another doctor's case with things as they are."

"You're not very helpful, George. Do you think I should go, then?"

"I think the best thing you can do is to wait. You might go all that way and find her perfectly well when you arrive. If there are no reports of progress, then that will be the time to act. I could then, as your medical attendant, get this man Wetzel on the telephone and find out what's happening. But quite frankly, Margaret, I think you're making a mountain out of a molehill."

She sighed and followed me to the door, where I sprang into the hospital car that had brought me there. I was a little annoyed. I had lost valuable time on a wild-goose chase when we were very busy. These mothers! I thought. After all the girl's not a baby and she's in the hands of good friends. I had met Rudolf Grosskreutz at the Jacobis' house, and I could not imagine that he would employ quacks. But I cannot help wondering now whether my success in dissuading Margaret from going to Baden-Baden was not unwise. I do not mean medically. Margaret's presence might have stayed the commencement of a train of events that was to lead to disaster.

When I returned to the hospital, I found that there was a patient waiting for me: he was all ready to go into theatre. And in the course of the subsequent operation I forgot all about my promise to Margaret to look up Dr. Otto Wetzel. It did not come back to me till fairly late in the evening, and I hurried to the library to turn up the Register. While I was running my fingers down the Ws, a colleague named Erckheimer came in.

"Whose black past are you turning up?" he asked, as he turned to the shelves.

I did not hear him clearly at first. I had found the entry I wanted and was scanning it quickly. Wetzel seemed to be a good man, if academic qualifications meant anything—which they do not always. And he had held, despite his youth, some quite good positions.

Erckheimer repeated his question.

"A man named Otto Wetzel," I replied, "now practising at Baden-Baden. He's attending Else Jacobi there, and her mother wants to know if he's good enough to look after her treasure." I was still feeling a little disgruntled over my wasted time.

Erckheimer grinned. "You needn't trouble to look him up," he said. "I was at Cologne with him. He used to be held up to us as a model of what a budding physician should be. Brilliant—yes. He took honours in everything and most of the special prizes. Otto will go a long way, Sava—there's no mistake about that. Besides, he's good looking and has got a way with the women and well—you and I know what that means."

"I shan't tell all that to Frau Jacobi," I said. "It might alarm her still more. But I can tell her quite confidently that the precious Else is in very good hands."

"Very good hands," he replied with a knowing grin. "Very good hands indeed."

I went to the telephone and called Margaret. With all the eloquence at my command, I persuaded her that Wetzel was a first-class doctor and I told her there was a man at the hospital who knew him personally and would vouch for it. She seemed relieved. I was glad, for I had expected her to insist on my calling again. She had seemed rather aggrieved at my failure to look up Wetzel immediately on my return and telephone her at once.

To forestall further complications and importunities, I rang the next day and the day after to inquire if there was fresh news of Else. On each occasion the report was reassuring, and on the third, Else was reported completely recovered.

"There you are, Margaret," I said with self-satisfaction. "I told you it would all come out all right."

"All the same, George, I still think I, at least, ought to have gone. She was with good friends, I know, but they are not quite the same."

"She's recovered," I returned, "and that's the main thing, isn't it?"

There, the whole affair ought to have ended. But it did not. It so happened that I had a fairly long-standing arrangement to dine with the Jacobis a few nights later in order to meet an Austrian surgeon who was to stay there. Of course, I inquired after Else.

"She seems in perfect health," Margaret replied, "and she seems to have taken quite a fancy to Dr. Wetzel. She tells me they have been out motoring together, and that he's quite a friend of the family—he's there almost every day, either to lunch or dinner."

The memory of Erckheimer's grin came to me. "He's got a way with the women," he had said; and I recalled that other significant grin when he had stressed in what good hands Else was. But I made no special comment. I was more interested in what the Austrian surgeon had to say; he had written some articles in the medical journals on abdominal surgery, which I was very anxious to discuss.

It was a very busy spell at the hospital. Hospitals, like other institutions, whether they sell soda water or heal bodies, have their rush periods and their slack periods which are quite unpredictable in their incidence. There was no particular reason for that glut of work, but I recall it vividly as one of the busiest times I had ever spent in the theatre in peacetime. I was to learn what real strain meant much more in England—in London—when the blitz came. But nothing then was further from my mind than war surgery.

Work slackened off about a week later, and I felt in need of quiet rest and refreshment. I thought of the Jacobis. I was always at liberty to ring them up and suggest that I called; indeed, they expected me to do so and were almost offended if I left it too long. So I telephoned the house and asked for Frau Jacobi. The maid who answered the telephone was dubious.

"I don't know, sir. She is in very great distress, but I'll ask her, if you will hold the line for a moment."

"Distress?" I asked in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"She has had bad news, sir." And that was all the maid would say. Perhaps she did not know herself, though I thought that unlikely. Servants have some kind of jungle telegraph of their own, and it is a very wise employer who can keep a secret from them.

But despite the maid's doubts, Margaret herself spoke next on the telephone. Her voice was very weary and strained.

"Don't ask me what's happened, George," she said. "I'm so glad you've rung. Perhaps you can give me something to pull me round. Come at once—do, please."

Looking back on it, I see that that was the first of the many distress calls on the telephone I was to have from Margaret.

Puzzled and a little alarmed, for this sounded really serious, I got my hat and coat and set out at once. Twenty minutes later I was waiting in the lounge watching, fascinated by its ugliness, a rectangular electric clock jerk its way through the hours in half-minute steps at a time. It was a new addition to the exhibition, as I always thought of that room.

A little later, Margaret entered the room. She was looking very white and shaken, and she walked as though every movement was an effort. I hastened to her side and helped her to a chair.

"Margaret," I asked, "whatever is the matter?"

"Else," she said dully. "It's Else."

The explanation was not at all clear, and I doubted whether Margaret was in a fit condition to give one. Her voice was typical of one who had been very badly shocked. The wildest thoughts ran through my head. Had there been a sudden relapse after that illness? Had there been an accident?

"It's that Dr. Wetzel," she went on in the same monotonous voice.

"Oh?"

"Oh, George, it's terrible!" she said with a little more energy in her tone. "They've—they've eloped."

I opened my eyes wide. But I was neither so surprised nor so shocked as I might have been, for once again that knowing grin of Erckheimer's flashed into my memory. So Wetzel had that sort of way with women, I thought. Well, that won't get him very far in his career. It's more likely to bring it to an abrupt end.

Rather incoherently I offered my sympathy. She nodded almost imperceptibly.

"I'm too shocked to speak about it. You had better read this." She fumbled in her belt and produced a crumpled letter that looked as though it had already been read very many times. I took it and smoothed it out, first looking at the signature. It was Rudolf Grosskreutz.

I have read many extraordinary letters in my time—abusive, amorous, tragic, self-humiliating, bombastic, humble; but none has been quite equal to this. It might have been the abject confession of a guard who had let a burglar steal the crown jewels under his very eyes.

The account was clear enough however. Else and the young doctor had seemed to be mutually attracted, and the Grosskreutzes had not seen any reason for keeping them apart. Else was, after all, a marriageable, if rather too young, girl—that was the phrase Rudolf Grosskreutz actually used; it remained in my memory because of its suggestions of the attitude of a past age—and Otto Wetzel was not at all a bad match. His family was good; his uncle was the Graf von Wetzel. Everyone said the young man had a most brilliant career before him, and he was very attractive personally.

"I should not have hesitated," wrote Grosskreutz, "to consider him a fit match for my own daughter, and, as you know, I hold Else only less in my affection than her . . ."

The four of them—Otto, Else, Matilde, and a young officer of the *Reichswehr*, as it then was—had gone out together, principally on motoring trips. And this seemed to Grosskreutz to call for explanation.

"This is the step I most regret. I admit that it was unwise to let these young people be alone among themselves so much. But these days are different from those of my own youth, and the young are very persistent and think nothing of these things. I admit I saw no objection to these outings in which all of them took a pleasure that was almost childlike . . ."

And then Else and Otto had gone out one day on their own. They had not been expected back to lunch, as they had taken two large picnic baskets with them—two baskets that, as it turned out, had been carefully emptied of the food and other things with which the servants had packed them and been refilled with clothes. The afternoon and evening wore on, and still there was no sign of their return. Grosskreutz had begun to get worried. When they did not appear at dinner, he was seriously perturbed. At ten o'clock precisely—the clock had chimed, he said, as he went to the telephone—he rang up the police and asked if they knew of any accident. They had heard of nothing, but promised to make inquiries of the villages round about. Grosskreutz gave a description of Wetzel's car—a magnificent semi-racing model Mercedes-Benz, which, if it had been driven at all hard, would be very many miles away after all these hours. He did not know what direction they had taken or what their plans had been. This last remark in his letter caused me a little ironic amusement.

Then he had settled down to wait. He had sat up all night. When the first grey streaks of dawn appeared, he had telephoned the police again. Still they knew nothing. They were investigating several reports, some of which seemed contradictory, for cars answering to the description had been seen at approximately the same time in places tens of

kilometres apart. Herr Grosskreutz could rest assured that all possible was being done . . .

He had been unable to eat any breakfast. He had cancelled his business appointments for the day—like Isaac he combined his holidays with more profitable activities, and he had apparently been calling on business friends who also were taking similar holidays in Baden-Baden. And then the first post had arrived. It had brought a short note from Else, apologizing briefly for her sudden departure and saying that she and Otto had eloped. He enclosed the note, but it was not in the letter that Margaret had handed to me. No doubt it had been stored away in some special place.

The letter ended on a note of humiliating self-accusation. He had been utterly careless and thoughtless. He had failed in his duty to Isaac and Margaret, and above all to Else. He had betrayed the trust that the Jacobis had reposed in him. He was desolate. What little he could do was being done as energetically as possible, but that did not exculpate him of guilt and shame . . .

For a minute or two after finishing the letter I remained silent, not knowing quite what to say, and before I had made up my mind, Isaac came in. He looked grave and serious, but it was obvious he was taking it characteristically in his own way. It was a problem that had arisen, and problems, if they affected him adversely, were just things to be solved and swept out of the way.

“It’s a bad business,” I said to him, for want of something more original to say.

He nodded. “Yes. But I should like further information. At any rate, I don’t put much faith in these local police. Grosskreutz did right to inform them—it was the only thing he could do; but they’re sure to bungle it. I’ve been on to a friend of mine in the Police Department in Berlin, and he’s promised to see that the thing is properly run.”

Quite typical, I thought. Isaac had allies—perhaps one could not call them friends—everywhere.

"We are sure to find them," he added. "In the meantime, George, I'd like you to keep an eye on Margaret. You'll agree she's in a very low state, as was only to be expected. Her first impulse was to go at once to Baden-Baden, but I've managed to dissuade her. After all, she could do nothing there that couldn't be done here, and I feel that if Else suddenly decides to give up this madness, she'll come back here rather than go to the Grosskreutzes, who, when all is said and done, are only friends. Besides, it would be impossible for Margaret to travel in her present state."

"It would—most decidedly," I said, not so much to express a considered medical opinion, which it was not, as to add what authority I had to the plan of keeping Margaret where she was. "I'll send her something along to soothe her nerves and perhaps help her to get a little rest and sleep, which is what she needs above all else. I'll look in again this evening to see how she is and I'll call tomorrow. And of course, Isaac, if there's anything else I can do to help you, you have only to ask me."

"Thank you, George," he replied. "I won't hesitate to do so if it should be necessary. But I think you'll be helping best by trying to build her up again. Look after Margaret and you'll be a real friend."

"You can rely on my doing that."

There was no further news when I called that evening. I stayed to dinner, from which Margaret was absent. The sedative I had sent her was working well, and she had gone to bed. Isaac told me that Rothaus, his Police Department friend, had telephoned to say that he had issued orders which would probably soon reveal what had happened. He did not say what they were, but even in the Weimar Republic, the police had immense powers inherited almost unaltered from their Imperial predecessors. There was little the Berlin Police Department did not know or could not find out if it had a mind.

In fact, the telephone rang just as I was thinking of going back to the hospital. I heard Isaac's sharp metallic *ja ja's* as he followed what his caller was saying, but I could not catch the other few words he said in a low voice. When he returned to me he was looking grave.

"Rothaus," he explained briefly. "The car has been traced. It's gone into Switzerland—got through the frontier before the Berlin orders were out. That complicates things a little, because it won't be so easy to reach them and bring them back. Grosskreutz was a fool, a damned fool, but then I've always thought so when it comes to action. He shouldn't have wasted time on writing but ought to have telephoned me at once. I might have been able to have them stopped then."

"But he had no idea till Else's letter reached him," I pointed out. "There was always the chance they might have had a breakdown or an accident in some lonely place, which hadn't been notified to the police."

"Yes, I suppose so." But he did not seem at all impressed by my suggestion. "I must think about this a lot before I tell Margaret. I certainly won't disturb her tonight. A few hours' delay won't make much difference."

I rose and said I must be going. He did not try to detain me. He was so absorbed in his own thoughts that I felt he did not care whether I went or stayed.

But at the door his warmth and friendliness returned.

"Thank you for looking after Margaret so well, George," he said. "That stuff you gave her is certainly working wonderfully. I know that she wouldn't have got a bit of rest tonight without it, and now she's sleeping as peacefully as a child."

"I'm glad I've been able to do something," I returned. "Sedatives are always a bit of a gamble, and I'm not at all keen on them. I'll look in as soon as I can tomorrow."

"Thank you, George, thank you," he said warmly, pressing my hand. "You are a very good friend."

Again the next day I was prevented from calling at the

house as early as I had wished. No doubt I could have obtained permission from the professor to pay a morning call, but, after all, my concern with the Jacobis was only my private affair. They had not even consulted me professionally in the strict sense. It was actually fairly late in the afternoon when I presented myself at the house. Isaac must have seen me coming, for he was in the hall to greet me.

"Oh, come in, George," he said, almost running towards me. "I'm so glad you've come at last. Busy at the hospital?"

"Very. One always gets these rushes at the most awkward moments. But what is the matter? How is Margaret?"

Both his manner and his expression suggested that there had been some fresh development. At first, when he had greeted me in that agitated way, I had suspected that Margaret had taken a turn for the worse; one can never predict what may happen in these cases that lie in the borderland between the physical and psychological. But I quickly ruled that out. If she had been taken seriously ill, Isaac would have telephoned for me at the hospital. I decided he must have some news to impart to me, and I waited expectantly.

"We have heard from Else," he said, as soon as we had entered the lounge and before I had had time to sit down.

"You have?" I rejoined, settling myself in the easy chair that had now come to be recognized as mine. "I hope it's good news."

"I can't say whether it's good or bad," he said rather gloomily. "She has eloped with that Wetzel fellow all right. They are in Switzerland. She apologizes for all the worry she is sure she has caused us, and says he wants to marry her and would like our consent and blessing. She writes of him as though she is very much in love with him, but how can she or we tell whether it is not a mere passing infatuation? She is so young—so inexperienced. It is not as if she were one of these modern girls, who already, at seventeen, seem to know more of life than their mothers did at forty or fifty. It is a difficult problem, George."

I made no comment. He was in a very businesslike mood. I could imagine him pacing up and down his office against a background of desk and files instead of against the setting of that modernist showpiece. He was thinking aloud to me and wanted a sympathetic listener—one who would be willing to offer a suggestion if it occurred to him. I let him go on without disturbing his train of thought.

"There's no need to tell you how fond Margaret and I are of Else," he continued. "I often think that we four here must be one of the happiest families in Germany. And, of course, we have always hoped that we should see our girl very happily married. But we did not think the problem of a suitable partner would come up so soon. It is very distressing. There isn't any objection to her marrying young, of course—after all, she is nearly the same age as Margaret was when we married. But I want to be sure she is not making a mistake."

I did not speak the thoughts that ran through my mind. He had spoken of her youth and inexperience and the possibility of her making a mistake. Yet I could not help feeling that her parents' care of her had, in some degree, contributed to the situation that had arisen. She had led an utterly sheltered life and, as so often happens, had probably succumbed easily to the first attractive man with whom she had come in contact. At that time I was making my first serious acquaintance with Freudian theory and apt to be a little dogmatic about these things. I felt that this was an example of his contention that the pattern of parental experience as children tends to repeat itself in their treatment of their own families. On a different level, and in a way that is different in degree only but not in kind, Margaret had brought up Else in the same secluded way as she herself had been raised. She had ruthlessly cut out the suppression and the drudgery and replaced it by luxury; but the basic principle of withdrawal from the wide world was there.

Isaac went on unheeding. "Margaret has taken it rather

badly, but not quite so badly as I expected," he went on, quite unaware of the theories playing about in my mind. I think the best thing to do is to write to Else and beg her to return home, telling her that we would not oppose her marriage to this Otto Wetzel, provided that she is quite sure he is the right one, and urging the need for reflection before taking such a grave step."

I nodded non-committally—for two reasons. The first was the very practical one that I knew it would be of little use to argue with Isaac if his mind were made up to a certain course of conduct—as it undoubtedly was. The second was that, being young, I doubted whether a young girl who had got into the state of eloping with a man she had known for barely a fortnight would be prepared to consider "the need for reflection".

He dismissed the matter rather abruptly, having used me, apparently, as someone on whom to try out his thoughts. He had made his decision, and there was no more to be said.

"I'd like you to see Margaret," he said, suddenly changing the subject—or, rather, turning to a different aspect of it. He rose at once to take me to her room. It was, after all, the primary reason for my visit.

Margaret was still looking strained, but the sleep produced by the drug had obviously done her good. To my surprise, she was inclined to see a ray of hope lighting the situation. She might have been excused had she felt that Else's letter had confirmed her worst fears, and I was quite prepared to find her utterly despondent. But Isaac had been talking to her and putting forward all his powers of persuasion. She had an idea that his letter would be effective and that Else would return. I gave her a vague impression that I shared her hopes. I did not, but there is never any point in worrying a patient with one's own private views—especially one suffering from shock.

Of course, I called every day—as much, I admit, to get news of a family crisis that aroused all my interest, as to keep

an eye on my patient. There was really very little I could do for the latter, in fact. Medicine has no specific remedies for troubles of this kind and can do no more than mitigate the gross reactions of emotional upheaval. And news was not long in coming.

It arrived not in the form they had hoped—a penitent Else, complete with baggage on the threshold—but in a letter. I think that letter shocked them a little, for it was written with a firmness and determination that they did not expect from their daughter. It was not at all a letter from an erring daughter regretting a disgraceful course of conduct and desiring to atone for it. On the contrary, it expressed the decision of a young woman who had fully made up her mind and who did not propose to alter it. Briefly she explained that she was very happy with her Otto and that though she hated grieving her parents, if the choice lay between him and them, she would choose him. She kept the initiative firmly in her hands.

Years later, Margaret was to admit to me that, secretly, she admired her daughter for that letter. She had memories of the stroke of rebellion that had set her feet on the road to happiness—enduring happiness as she had hoped. If it was not to be lasting that was because the individual is no match for Fate, and because in these days the clash of high politics reacts on even the humblest homes. But at the time, she merely appeared distressed and broken.

Isaac's solution of the problem had proved a failure. But he was a realist, in this as in all things. He had no wish to play the heavy father beloved of the melodramatist and cut his daughter off. There was no trace of the von Zeihallt mentality in him. On the contrary, he recognized that Else was not to be diverted from the course she had chosen. Perhaps he, too, secretly rejoiced at her determination, and felt that she was a true daughter of her father. He set about seeing if some sort of compromise could be found.

It was easy for him to obtain information about anyone.

He had friends—or acquaintances—who were only too ready to help this wealthy industrialist who wielded so much power. In a short time he had collected quite a little dossier about Wetzel. What he learnt did not entirely displease him.

The man's abilities and promise were beyond all doubt. His career as a student had been brilliant, and young though he was, he was already occupying an exceptionally good position with a solid income. His future was assured. Not only was he a doctor of more than ordinary competence; he had those social graces which, despite the sneers of the critics, must necessarily mean a lot to a man whose work lies with humanity. One cannot hope for success in a case unless one has the patient's confidence; human beings are human beings, not machines that are sent to the doctor to have their nuts and bolts tightened. And in gaining that confidence, ability to say the right thing at the right time, sympathy, tact—call it what you will, even the despised 'bedside manner'—may well mean more than skill in handling a microscope or making a blood test. One can, perhaps unfortunately, make a living as a doctor on the barest medical qualifications plus this gift of sympathy and understanding. One can also make a living as a medical scientist, treating patients simply as specimens. The man who combines high professional skill with a fine bedside manner—to use again the opprobrious term for which there is no real substitute—is destined for outstanding success. For what, after all, does that bedside manner amount to but applied psychology—a subject of which, in these days, doctors are expected to know a great deal or run the risk of being considered out-of-date, dangerous reactionaries.

From this point of view again, Otto Wetzel seemed a good match, at whom few fathers could afford to hesitate. But it was Wetzel's connexions that attracted Isaac even more. Wetzel's grandfather had been a count, though his father, being a younger son, had not inherited the title. None the

less he had been an officer in the old Imperial Army and in a crack cavalry regiment at that. It is somewhat ironic that these things counted for a lot in the Weimar 'revolutionary democratic' republic, and even with a man so shrewd and keenly business-like as Isaac Jacobi. And yet perhaps it is not surprising: it has always been the practice of the new aristocracy of wealth, the industrial barons, to form alliances with the old aristocracy of birth. In this way the *nouveaux arrivés* overcome some of their inferiority complex and also increase their power, while hamstringing their most dangerous enemies. In the uneasy Germany between Weimar and Hitler, the process was widespread.

It was these factors, I think, which caused Isaac to withdraw the natural objections that Else's incredible action had at first aroused. Whether they counted for as much with Margaret I was never able to discover. Her upbringing had given her a different outlook on the merits of the old aristocracy. She was hardly likely to see them as demigods. But she was always swayed by her husband in everything. The natural result of her crude upbringing was to make her utterly self-reliant in her own home and to make her the complete martinet in household affairs; but outside those spheres she had no self-confidence at all, eyen where her children's careers were concerned. She accepted Isaac's word as final in everything outside domestic management. He would have had no difficulty in making his point provided his mind was fully made up.

He was cautious. It would have been fatal to make a complete *volte-face*, and put him in the weak position of the conquered. Instead he wrote a polite but a non-committal letter saying that he and Margaret were coming to Zürich next week, and intended to discuss the whole matter. A few days later, Else's reply arrived. It was a cry of welcome for the news.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SHADOWS LENGTHEN

THE WHOLE atmosphere of the Jacobi house seemed to have changed abruptly from gloom to hope. Only a day or two before, all had seemed black: Otto Wetzel had been the evil seducer, even Else had become steeped in sin. But now that same Otto had been promoted to the status of an eligible husband, and there was obvious eagerness on the part of both Isaac and Margaret to see him.

I was rather surprised when they invited me to accompany them on their trip to Zürich. This seemed to me so entirely a family affair that the mere idea of the presence of strangers was almost unthinkable; and it was in this mood that I made my first refusal. But the Jacobis pressed me. They seemed to have the absurd idea that because Wetzel was a doctor, it was fitting that a member of his profession should be present. And I think, also, that Isaac wanted me as an expert adviser, as he might have put it. I would be in the position to weigh up Wetzel and determine his prospects of a successful career. A doctor comes to accept the path of risky prophecy more or less calmly, but this was going a little too far in my view.

However, they persisted. Indeed, it is not too much to say that they insisted. I had a week or twos' holiday due to me and in a moment of weakness, worn out by their unremitting badgering, I asked for permission to make use of it—a request that was readily granted. So it was that when the Jacobis set out, with a mountain of luggage, for Zürich, I went with them, cursing myself for being thus caught up in something that was, after all, no business of mine. There

is nothing more fraught with danger than to become involved in other people's family affairs.

The trip itself was pleasant enough. We travelled in luxury, and at each stop the stationmaster paid a semi-ceremonial visit to the wealthy Isaac Jacobi to make sure that he lacked for nothing—and no doubt to ensure that he should obtain at least a minute proportion of the Jacobi wealth. And in Zürich I found that a magnificent suite had been booked for us. It was, rather, a series of suites, for my own modest accommodation consisted of a bedroom, a small sitting-room, and a bathroom.

We arrived fairly early in the morning, and Else was on the platform to greet us. She did not bring her Otto with her. No doubt she perceived the wisdom of taking things gradually. No one would have thought, from the warmth of the greetings, that there had recently been a crisis between these three. The parents might have been merely fulfilling a prearranged plan of meeting their daughter on her holiday.

Else came back to the hotel and lunched with us. She was bright and gay—brighter and gayer, in fact, than I had ever seen her before. This affair, I thought, is doing her good. Love, even if it disguises itself as infatuation, is a splendid tonic, better than all the drugs in the pharmacopoeia. She did not mention Otto, so far as I could hear, and indeed, we never heard his name till Else was on the point of leaving.

"You had better bring Dr. Wetzel round to dinner to-night," said Isaac. He spoke firmly. It was an order rather than an invitation, the sighting shot in the engagement.

Else thanked him and said she would. I think from her ready acceptance that she and Wetzel had already thought out a plan of campaign, one principle of which was not to oppose parental authority needlessly.

That evening, therefore, we made the acquaintance of Otto Wetzel. He was a tall personable man with all the formal graces of the Prussian caste from which he sprang.

When he was introduced, he clicked his heels and bowed from the waist, and one felt that his left hand should have been resting on the pommel of his sword. He lost no time in ingratiating himself with Isaac and Margaret, using all the professional tricks of the man who is used to winning confidence. To me, he was faintly patronizing—perfectly polite, for, after all, I was the special guest of the Jacobis, but a little superior, none the less, as if thinking to himself: “What on earth is this foreigner doing here?” He discussed medicine with me in a distant sort of way, as though he thought it was his duty to do so, but he feigned to be delighted and bestowed a most rewarding smile on me when Margaret insisted that I was an extremely good doctor. I had grown too used to this attitude to trouble about it: I had endured it throughout my student days in Germany. After all, I was not merely a foreigner; I was even less than that—a man without, to all intents and purposes, a country. If my name, my accent, my appearance, were all Russian, there was no square foot of Russian soil on which I could have safely put myself.

I do not know whether any business was talked that evening. There could have been little opportunity for it, because we were together nearly all the time. And when we retired, Isaac made no comment at all, though he seemed thoughtful. Wetzel came again on the next day to lunch and spent some time alone with Isaac during the course of the afternoon. He appeared yet again, wearing his evening suit with the suggestion that it was a degrading thing and should have been a uniform, and took dinner with us.

This time, he did not prolong his stay. His whole manner was a combination of obsequiousness and self-confidence. He deferred to everything Isaac or Margaret said, but all the time with a kind of air about him that he belonged there and intended to stay.

It was after he had gone and Isaac was taking a final drink before going to bed that he spoke to me of Wetzel.

"Well, George," he said, "what do you think of him?"

"He seems to know his way about very well," I replied, trying to hide the antipathy I had taken to the man.

Isaac laughed. "That's not a very glowing testimonial," he commented. "It might be taken to mean all sorts of things. You think he's got a future as a doctor before him?"

"So far as I can see—yes," I answered. "But I've very little to go on. All I've seen are the airs and graces, and for what they're worth he should go a very long way indeed."

Again Isaac laughed. "I feel you're not altogether an unbiased witness, George," he remarked. "I descry the evil hand of prejudice. Personally I've formed a very good opinion of him. He certainly has what you've called 'airs and graces', but they count for a lot in his profession—and in all others, too. Personality is a very big asset. And they speak very highly of him. True, he's not very well known here, but I've met a friend of mine who's been to Baden-Baden, and there, he says, everyone looks upon him as the coming man. He's going to do great things."

"I can well believe it," I said, with as little venom as I could.

"Well, I'm going to have another talk with him tomorrow and try to discover what his resources are. One thing I like about him is his frankness—he puts all his cards on the table and doesn't try to beat about the bush. I like dealing with people like that."

I nodded, but made no comment. My resolve was to have as little to do with this thing and be as non-committal as I possibly could.

All the same I kept a very close eye on Dr. Otto Wetzel, if only because he interested me as an individual. I have never met any man, before or since, so keen on success. He was the complete careerist. I could not dispute the record of the medical directories which credited him with this and that academic distinction and honour and with important appointments gained at an early age, but the more I thought

about it the more I was convinced that this success was the result of a carefully planned campaign, and not the spontaneous result of natural aptitude and devotion to medicine. His main asset was his personality, as Isaac, that shrewd judge, had hinted; and none knew this better than Wetzel himself. He had set out to make a brilliant success of his training and studies simply to provide a frame to set off that personality. I think he was clever enough to see the wisdom of putting himself in a position so that no one could ever say that he depended on his manner alone.

In himself he was vain and a little pompous, in the typically Prussian way. Yet for all that his charm was undeniable and I could well imagine his success with women, especially with a girl like Else, so inexperienced. To him, I think, in that hectic period of Germany's modern youth, a period that reproduced and aggravated all the worst features of Britain's Bright Young People of a few years earlier, I fancy Else's lack of sophistication, even her sense of morals, must have been a refreshing surprise to him.

Reluctantly I grew to admire him. He knew what he wanted and was determined to get it. More than that, he could see clearly how to realize his aims and he had the courage and skill to put his plans into practice. I have tried to give a true picture of Isaac Jacobi as the hard, scheming, self-reliant business man he was in everything—a man who always got the better of a bargain. That is how he always struck me. But anyone who had first met Jacobi during those days in Zürich might have been excused for imagining him a not very discerning person, easily influenced by flattery and adulation. It is no exaggeration to say that after three days Otto Wetzel had Isaac Jacobi, the great industrialist, quite firmly wrapped round his finger. Wetzel had found the chink in the business man's armour: the sneaking regard that man nearly always had for the aristocracy of birth and the honour of an old name. He had seen that he had held the trumps and he had played

them with consummate skill. Perhaps for the first time in his life, and without realizing it, Isaac Jacobi found himself out-generalled and out-maneuvred by a brain keener, more agile, more subtle, than his own.

It was barely a week after our arrival when Isaac told me that he and Margaret had decided not merely to give their consent to the match but also to do all they could for the couple. They had, so Isaac said, taken quite a fancy to this young and enterprising doctor, who (though these were not Jacobi's words or thoughts) did not hesitate to match his wits against those of a man with a reputation for being a master-schemer.

"He'll go far," Jacobi said to me. "I am perfectly happy that Else should marry him. He comes of a good family. He will attain to very high distinction—especially with the help I think I can give him. And he is very fond of Else, as she is of him. It will be an ideal match."

"I sincerely hope so."

"Of course," Isaac went on. He was in an expansive mood. "Of course, I shall have to look after Else to start with. Naturally at his age he is not yet in a position to give her all the luxuries she has been used to. There will be a settlement."

I nodded understandingly. Of course there would be a settlement. No doubt Wetzel had led the way to that subject. But I was quite unprepared for what followed.

"It's not easy to decide what it should be," said Isaac. "I was wondering whether a million reichsmarks would be sufficient."

I gasped. A million reichsmarks! At the nominal rate of exchange that would be round about fifty thousand pounds of English money. The sum was almost fantastic.

"I should regard it as extremely generous," I commented.

"I think it about fair," he said.

"Of course, you will have a proper settlement drawn up," I said cautiously. I did not want either to let him see my

suspicions of Wetzel or to suggest he did not know his own business.

"No." He shook his head. "I trust Wetzel implicitly. I don't wish him to see that there could be the slightest shade of suspicion resting on him. Those settlements that so carefully rule out the husband from participating in his wife's money always seem to me on the verge of insult. The parents have no right to come between husband and wife, nor have the lawyers."

I was staggered. It was surprising enough to find Isaac ready to give away so much money, though his generosity to his family was an established fact. But it was overwhelming to know that he proposed to hand over a million marks to a man whom he had known only a week and who had first come to his notice as his daughter's seducer. But I said nothing beyond making a vague noise. It was Isaac's money, Isaac's daughter, Isaac's affair, altogether.

Some may say that, as a friend of the Jacobis, I should have spoken my doubts and misgivings about Otto Wetzel, and that it was an obligation resting on me in all the circumstances. Theoretically that may be so. But ethical principles so rarely take into account the personal factors. I knew Isaac Jacobi too well. He was not asking my advice or seeking my opinion. His mind was made up, and that meant that the whole thing was finished so far as he was concerned. To attempt to argue with him would have been futile. My doubts would have been dismissed as due to prejudice and would only have served to have made him even more determined on his chosen course of action. If there was one thing he could not endure it was any criticism, direct or implied, of his own judgments.

At dinner that night we duly toasted the newly betrothed pair. Else looked extremely happy, and Otto played the part of the ideal prospective son-in-law with such aplomb that I could not help wondering how often he had done it before. Isaac and Margaret were completely charmed—or perhaps

bewitched is the better word. They seemed to hang on every word he spoke.

I forgot what it was that called Isaac away, though I have an impression it was an urgent long-distance telephone call—he was never far from his business affairs; and in any event it is of no importance. The point is that I found myself alone with Wetzel, the ladies having retired.

"Now we're alone, may I congratulate you again, Wetzel?" I said, for want of something better to say. I always found some difficulty in talking to him.

"Thank you, Sava," he returned formally. One could feel that he wanted to click his heels and bow slightly. "I am a very fortunate and happy man. And this occasion is very lucky. I wanted to have a talk with you."

"Oh?"

I was really surprised. He had never shown any particular desire for either my company or my conversation, but now he was quite affable—though it was possible to detect a slight note of condescension in his voice.

"You've known the Jacobis quite a while, haven't you, Sava?" he asked.

So that was it, I thought. He is after inside information.

"Not so very long," I replied. "The son was a patient of mine—that's how I met them—and you know how patients have a habit of slipping into the position of personal friends."

He nodded. "The right kind of patients—yes. Now listen, Sava—we're brother doctors and I can speak freely to you. You know how things are. I'm going to marry Else for the primary reason that I happen to be extremely fond of her. But I'd like to know a little more of the family of which I shall soon be a member. You see, Sava, I've got relations to satisfy—rather old-fashioned ones, very proud of the family name and all that sort of thing—and you know what they can be like. Do you think you could tell me anything about them?"

"As I've told you, Wetzel," I answered, "I don't know a great deal about them. Isaac Jacobi is certainly the wealthiest man I know and his position is certainly as sound as a bell. Everyone in Hanover knows them. I think their house will surprise you when you see it. They visit all the chief houses round about, and they give frequent dinner parties. Beyond that I know no more than you do."

"Thank you, Sava. It's a great relief to me. You see, Herr Jacobi has spoken of a settlement and all that—it doesn't interest me really—but he started talking in such immense sums I wondered if he was—well, one of those Jews who love to talk big."

I did not quite like the suspicion of contempt with which he had spoken the word 'Jews'. But his whole manner conveyed his attitude. He felt he was conferring an honour on the Jacobis by consenting to marry their daughter, and he wanted to make sure that his recompense was assured. I cannot know what was in his mind when he eloped with Else, but it may be that he thought she had trapped him neatly into marriage when all he had bargained for was a few weeks' love-making, and, as a result, he was determined to make the parents pay for it. If he did, he was a poor judge of character, for I could not imagine Else trapping anyone into anything. But I doubt whether Wetzel ever considered anyone as a human being except in so far as that other person was likely to be of use to him.

"So far as I am concerned, I find the Jacobi family perfectly charming," I said, a little coldly, "and that is sufficient for me."

"Thank you, Sava," he said suavely. "That is a very nice thing to say about your friends, and it confirms my own opinions."

He tried to turn the talk pleasantly to medical matters. Had I ever met so-and-so? What did I think of Professor This as a surgeon? But I could see this was mere politeness. He had got what he wanted—and asked for it with a brutal

lack of finesse that was, in itself, an insult to me—and he had lost interest in me. It was a great relief when Isaac returned.

"Getting along well together?" he asked with a smile. "Talking shop I expect. You doctors can never keep off it. But why should you? A man's business or profession is his chief interest after all—that and his family."

I excused myself at the earliest possible moment and went to bed. I found Wetzel intolerable and Isaac inexplicable. How he, with his reputation for acumen and getting always the right person for anything he wanted done for him, could succumb so easily to the blatant flattery of this careerist was beyond me. But then the fascination and glamour of the great name, especially when it is borne by a very minor cadet, has always been beyond me. That may be because in Russia I had been brought up among people whose families were among the most famous in the country, and whose names glittered in the *Almanach de Gotha*—a people who, when the hour of crisis came, had shown themselves barely worthy of the name of man and woman, mere shams.

Next day, tired of these infuriating proceedings, I pretended I had had a recall to my hospital and left during the afternoon. I did not travel this time with royal honours, but at least I felt that the air was purer. I could see only one explanation for Jacobi's stupidity: his utter selflessness and generosity to his family. Perhaps I was being unfair in ascribing it all to the machinations of Otto Wetzel. I did not know what part Else had played. She might have pleaded with her parents and believed herself to be utterly in love with Wetzel. If that was so, then the major blame was still Wetzel's, but at one remove. He had no doubt dazzled Else, seeing her inexperience, with a display of tricks that he would have given to any girl whom he considered eligible to fill the place of wife—a girl whose qualifications would undoubtedly be family wealth and a generous father. I liked Else, though I always had thought her upbringing had been too sheltered, even though I did not care for the wilder

extremes of contemporary youth. As the train hurried me back to what I considered scenes of sanity in the hospital, I felt rather depressed. There was going to be disillusion for the Jacobis, I was convinced; though how shattering and complete I did not then guess. No one could foresee the bedlam that Germany was to become in the next few years.

The shadows were gathering round Germany, and they were to fall across the paths of many besides the Jacobis. The exalted were to be cast down and their places taken, not by the meek, but by the unprincipled and the criminal. I do not mean by that the Weimar Republic was a model state in which the rule of right and virtue was paramount. Most definitely it was not. Corruption and bribery were everywhere. Politics, business, even private life, were rotten to the core. Those who seeing the evils of the Nazis are inclined to idealize the Weimar Republic, deceive themselves. It never had the support of the German people. It was to all intents and purposes doomed from its birth, because the military caste and its hangers-on were never effectively broken. And it was the direct interest of this caste to aggravate abuses, increase dissension, sow broadcast the seeds of disaffection, and hamstring all efforts, however well directed, the republican government might make to alleviate conditions.

Grim times were at hand for the industrial nations of the world. The world slump had set in, and the few years' boom that Germany had known was proving a false summer. Unemployment mounted till the number of workless amounted to eight millions. The man with a job was an exception. Poverty, starvation, want of every kind, came to every home except those of the favoured few, who continued to behave as though the height of prosperity were still being enjoyed. In Britain and in America unemployment grew and grew. Germany was not alone in that affliction. But she was perhaps alone in that her unemployment was being

deliberately nurtured to serve a revolutionary—or rather reactionary—end.

Successive ‘democratic’ governments could do little, because they had the support of none but little groups. The people of Germany had no tradition of self-government behind them. For centuries, their idea of government had been something imposed from above, and it was perhaps too much to hope that the arts of democracy could be learnt in the atmosphere of hate, distrust, disillusion, and tragedy, left behind by a great war that had shaken the very foundations of the country. The war was the source of all Germany’s troubles: that was the current attitude. The old days were regarded nostalgically as a kind of golden age. This in itself may have been the damnation of the Weimar Republic. It might have worked if the people had so willed, but they had no active interest in it.

The whole fabric of the false boom crumbled. The foreign money that had flowed so freely into the country ceased to arrive. How could it when Wall Street, its main source, was in the throes of disaster, with banks crashing and financial houses dissolving into bankruptcy? And as they had turned the misfortunes of the ‘twenties to their own ends, those whose aim it was to restore the rule of the military caste in Germany now took advantage of world conditions. Nothing like this had happened under the old Imperial regime—that was the story that they put about. It was only the fumbling and weakness of a republican democratic government that could drag the great Fatherland to a level such as this. Thus were the seeds of Nazidom sown—seeds that were to bring a harvest of blood to the sacred soil of Germany. The people, worn out and weary with trials to which there seemed no end, looked for a strong lead. What did forms and formalities of government matter provided the right result was attained?

And it was the republican government itself that led the flight from democracy. Even the arch democrats who

framed the Weimar Constitution could not entirely escape the ingrained German belief in autocracy; almost unnoticed a clause giving such powers to the President and Chancellor had been introduced. From 1930 onwards, government in Germany was more and more by decree, less and less by the machinery of democracy. Even that sorry ghost that had masqueraded as democracy in Germany from 1919 onwards for twenty years was dead before Hitler came to power—and belief in it was one of the easiest victims the Nazis had to kill.

The days of Weimar were numbered. With them were doomed those like the Jacobis to whom the misfortunes of others had contributed wealth, position, comfort, and leisure. They were by no means all Jews, but the Jews were the easiest to single out. A stupefied people blindly and indiscriminately sought two things: one was a saviour, the other was a scapegoat. It thought it had found the one in Hitler, the second in the Jews.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FROM SUNSET TO NIGHT

IT TOOK some little time for the first faint blows of the crisis to reach the Jacobis. Disasters are always slow in reaching the top, and it is ever those whose lives are spent on the borderline of starvation who bear the first brunt. With the least to say in any nation's affairs, they are the first victims to be offered up in atoning sacrifice for a nation's blunders.

No doubt in his business affairs, Jacobi was among the first to realize how difficult matters were going to be, but that did not affect his private life. On the contrary, just as the darkest night is often preceded by the most glorious sunset, so it seemed that those few years immediately following Else's wedding were a brief flaming up of glory for the Jacobis.

I was invited to the wedding, but luckily found myself far too busy to attend. The more I thought of that affair the less I liked it; and certainly the more I heard of Wetzel, the less I wanted to meet him. But the ceremony, which took place at Baden-Baden, was, I was told, an immense success. A report of it filled a couple of columns in a copy of the local paper that Margaret sent me. In the list of guests were two counts and seven barons, and the combined wealth of the industrialists and financiers who attended must have run into milliards of marks. Else, of course, was a Jewess, but there was no report of the Jewish marriage, which, I believe, took place, no doubt as a mark of gratitude for the handsome dowry.

A long honeymoon had been planned, and the couple made a grand tour of Europe. They returned to the Jacobis' home in Hanover, and for a month there followed a series

of parties and receptions at that house on a scale never before attempted. There was something almost every night, but though I received an invitation to every one, I limited my attendances as much through choice as necessity.

It was during this period that I had further opportunities of seeing more of Wetzel. Not only did I meet him at the Jacobis' house: he paid also several visits to the hospital with the object, as he put it, of enlarging his experience. Professionally, he was a puzzle to me. There could be no doubting his ability and his knowledge, but he took no live interest in medicine as medicine. It was, I think, just a means—a respectable means, as befitted the cadet of a noble house—of making a living. He had used his natural gifts to qualify well and establish some sort of a position for himself. But for the rest, he was prepared to rely upon his personality, the power of influence, and the tricks of the careerist. He could have gone far on his talents alone, but, apart from anything else, I think that devotion to the profession would have demanded of him a consistency and adherence to principle that were not in his nature. In the Germany that was so soon to be, perhaps the course he chose was the wiser one.

Nor could I quite fathom his exact attitude to Else. In public he was certainly the adoring young husband, and on more private occasions he invariably spoke of her with what sounded like affection. I do believe that then, at least, he was genuinely fond of her. But I doubted whether it was in his character that it should last. He was one of those people who can, for a short while, utterly absorb themselves in a cause, a study, a person, only to forget all about it a short while afterwards. It was in one such mood, I imagine, that he made his brilliant flight as a medical student.

As for Else, there could be no doubt of her happiness. She quite obviously worshipped her Otto, and to her he could do no wrong. When they were apart she was dull and listless; as soon as he appeared, her whole manner changed. Her

eyes brightened and she became a happy, utterly satisfied woman. This was no passing infatuation, I thought as I watched them together; she would cleave to him as long as she had breath in her body. My thoughts added cynically that if he ran true to form and decided at any time to throw her off, he might find that this time the way to his own self-gratification might not be so easy. She would never surrender him without a fight.

While the Jacobi household rejoiced, the background of German affairs grew more sombre and more sinister. The Nazis were coming more and more into the open. In some towns there was already something not far from civil war between them and the Communists. In Hanover itself, street fights became more and more common. At first the police treated them as common brawls, but as time went on their attitude became one of something like neutrality, benevolently inclined towards the arrogant Brown Shirts of the S.A. It was almost as if they had decided that the best way was to leave these turbulent, warring groups a free hand to wipe each other out—or at any rate to restrict interference to such an extent as would enable the Brown Shirts to maintain the upper hand.

After a little while, Isaac began to feel the repercussions of the march of events. It was not merely in the streets that the Nazis sought mastery, whatever the Government of the day might think about them. They aimed at dominating everything, and a big concern like Jacobi's was an obvious target. Moreover, the strong anti-Jewish bias of their creed was becoming more and more manifest. A copy of *Der Stürmer* was never far from the Brown Shirt's hand.

In his attitude to the new developments in Germany, Isaac Jacobi showed much the same sort of blindness as he revealed in his handling of Otto Wetzel. The shock of what happened later was, I think, all the greater because until it was too late he quite failed to foresee the trend of events

and imagined himself in a much safer position than he actually was.

I remember once discussing with him the way things were shaping. To me, they looked grave, and I was already beginning to realize that, as a foreigner, my position in Germany was even less secure than it had been up till then. My thoughts had always been turned to England as an ultimate goal, and now my predilections were reinforced.

"Things are beginning to look serious," I said. We were alone together after one of those interminable parties that now filled even the enormous Jacobi house every night.

"I think most of it is surface froth," he returned slowly.

"That's hardly a suitable term for organized street fighting and an almost helpless police, is it?" I asked, a little surprised at his indifference.

"I don't think the police are as helpless as most people think," he responded. "Personally, I'm inclined to think their action is wise. In times like these, with unemployment steadily rising and distress everywhere, there are bound to be high feelings, and these things act as a safety valve. It's regrettable, but if it were driven underground by repressive measures the final result would be very much worse."

"Well, I suppose that's a point of view," I commented, "though I don't think I see it that way. But surely you can't find any justification for all this Jew baiting?"

He shrugged. "Of course I can't. But it's not unexpected or unusual, is it? If things go wrong, people look round for a scapegoat—and in Germany especially they usually find one in my people. What was it Shakespeare said—'Suffering is the badge of all our tribe', wasn't it? That is as true today as it was in England centuries ago."

"Don't you yourself anticipate any trouble?" I know I was being pressing, perhaps rude and personal, but there was something about his manner that roused my curiosity. He seemed so sure of himself.

Again he shrugged. "Frankly, no. I don't think any political party would dare to touch me. You see, apart from my position and the many friends in high places I have, it happens that my work is of the greatest importance to the State. I can't say more. Perhaps I've said too much in saying that. But I trust you, George, and know it will go no further."

It was quite obvious that he would pursue the subject no further. His last remark mystified me. What precisely did he mean by that? I knew, of course, that he conducted a pretty large export trade now, and that its preservation was of vital importance. And I realized that machine-tools were almost a basic industry in our modern mechanized civilization. But his manner suggested that he was referring to something else. Afterwards, I learnt that it was, of course, manufacturing parts for war weapons of some kind—parts that looked innocent enough, even though the immediate market for them was not apparent. The Nazis merely carried into the open the widespread manufacture of armaments that the Germans had begun years before. The more one studies afresh the history of the past few years, the more one sees that the Nazis, so far from starting anything new in German policy, did little more than intensify it and bring its products into the light of day. It is easy to see that now, though it was difficult enough, even for those on the spot, living and working among the Germans, to grasp it then.

Isaac's complacency was destined not to last long. Backed by powerful financial interests who saw in the Nazis the saviours of the world against the menace of Communism, the Brown Shirts had a special role to play in the industrial field. They provided a ready means by which the too enterprising methods of successful competitors could be checked—and usually in a way that made them appear as the ally and friend of the ordinary humble working man and his wife. Nor did their party have to be in power for them to exercise their restrictive, domineering function.

This was brought home to Isaac as early as 1931, more than a year before Hitler became Chancellor. It arose out of a perfectly commonplace incident.

A man was dismissed. Probably it was the sort of thing that, normally, would barely have interested Isaac, who could not be expected to follow the affairs of every one of his several thousand employees. The local Brown Shirt leader called on the manager concerned and, with threats, ordered the man's reinstatement. The manager refused. He was used to the interference of trades union officials in such cases, but he quite failed to see that the Nazi Party had any right at all to intervene.

There were further complications, and the matter was referred to Isaac. He supported his manager. The case was, to him, quite plain. He was master in his own factory and would take orders from no one. In the past he had stood out against trades unions in similar affairs and had won. In the conditions of that time, he could not visualize failure. The only weapon that could be employed against him, he thought, was the strike—and what good could a strike do when for every man he employed there were two waiting to step into the vacant place, unemployed who would be eager to take a job at any price, whether the trade union said yea or nay. Isaac Jacobi issued a notice to the effect that the dismissal would stand with his full approval, and that his right to decide who should or should not work for him was his, inalienably.

He was astonished when it was reported to him that not only had the man concerned continued to come to work, but had also created a scene at the end of the week when the cashier had refused to pay him. Jacobi sent for the man, Hans Leimutt, who came into his chief's room with an insolent air. He did not even trouble to remove the dirty cap he wore.

"You have been causing trouble, I hear," said Isaac, sternly. "You have had your dismissal and you have no

right in the works at all. If you persist in coming, I shall ask the police to remove you as an unauthorized person."

The man said nothing but gave Jacobi an impertinent stare. Isaac told me that, for the moment, the man's disrespect was so blatant that he thought he must be mad.

"You have nothing to say?" Jacobi tapped his desk. "Then I hope you understand. You will go out of here and you will stay out."

"I don't take orders from you," said the man suddenly with explosive violence. "You're a damned Jew."

With great difficulty Isaac smothered his anger.

"No one can give orders here except me," he returned. "If you are not out of this room in two minutes, I'll call someone to throw you out and hand you over to the police."

"Do you know you are talking to the commander of number six squad of the Brown Shirts?" asked the man.

"That means nothing to me. Are you going?" Isaac's finger hovered over the bellpush on his desk.

"If you have me thrown out, you will regret it. But have it as you like. You won't be here long to bleed and insult us." And the man spat straight in Isaac's face.

Not unnaturally, Isaac lost his temper. His finger came down hard on the push and when his amazed secretary appeared he shouted for assistance. For a few minutes there was pandemonium, but after a little while the unwelcome visitor was escorted, none too gently, to the door by a couple of muscular timekeepers.

There, Jacobi thought, the matter will end. He had asserted his authority and shown no inclination to compromise or weakness, for he quite realized that if he yielded a single point in this argument he would soon be faced with a situation in which any sort of works discipline would be impossible. But he had yet to learn both the arrogance and the unofficial power of the Nazi Party.

A couple of days later he was at work at his desk when he was told a Herr Joerg wished to see him on urgent

business, the nature of which he said he could not divulge as it was confidential.

"Can't you find out what he wants?" asked Isaac irritably. He hated being disturbed when he was busy. "Who is he? What does he look like?"

His secretary shook her head. "He refuses to say what he wants, sir, she replied. "I've never seen him before, but he looks a man of standing. I should say he was a military officer—and a senior one at that."

Isaac pricked up his ears. He was not unused to visitors of this kind. Even the Weimar Government had its secret emissaries and carried on a lot of business by subterranean methods.

"All right, then. I'll see him in a few minutes."

Herr Joerg strode into the room with a determined and dominating air. He raised his hand in the Nazi salute, at which Jacobi raised his eyebrows. It had not then become the essential form of greeting.

"Sit down, Herr Joerg," he said. "There are cigarettes in the box on the table by the chair. Now what can I do for you?"

"I prefer to stand," replied the man curtly. "I do not smoke, thank you." He paused. "I have come to warn you, Herr Jacobi."

"Warn me?"

Isaac was not unnaturally surprised at this melodramatic opening to the interview.

"Yes, Herr Jacobi. You have insulted a member of the Party. You, a Jew, have dared to threaten a Brown Shirt. I warn you. It can happen only once. If there is any more of it, you will regret it. You had better not interfere in any way with our work for the Fatherland."

"I understand what you refer to, but the rest is sheer nonsense." Isaac was not a coward. "Your Brown Shirts are not yet the Government, nor will they ever be. Who are you, Herr Joerg?"

The other drew himself up and clicked his heels. "I am the Leader in this sector. As for your prophecies, Herr Jacobi, we shall see. It will not be long before a Nazi Government rules in this land, and then we shall free it from the foul infection of your race."

"I see. Now, Herr Joerg, it is time for me to warn you. Let me remind you that I am master here and I will stand no interference with my legitimate rights. A large part of my work now is for the Government—the country. It is not for you or anyone outside, whatever his political opinions, to try to dictate to me."

"We are being tolerant to you, Herr Jacobi," said Joerg, "because for the moment your factory is useful to the country—and to us. But be cautious. Do not interfere with our directions or meddle with our business. You will regret it if you do. Good day."

He turned smartly and marched out. Jacobi stared after him. The whole thing seemed fantastic to him, and after a little thought he dismissed it from his mind.

In the next few months, however, he was constantly reminded of Herr Joerg, and the true state of affairs was made quite plain to him. Incidents of various kinds occurred in the works—incidents in which the Nazis always had a hand, and in the control of which he received no assistance from his managers and foremen. To all intents and purposes the Nazis took charge of the place. Any matter that affected one of their own Party was decided by them, and it was fruitless to try, by legal or other means, to dispute the decision.

But there was one more crisis before Isaac finally realized that he was powerless in the very business that he had built up by his own endeavour and energy. It concerned a draughtsman named Heinrich Leinz.

Like most big business, German industry was a curious mixture of monopoly and competition. Firms pooled some of their patents through their cartels and rings, while others

they kept jealousy to themselves. The case of Leinz arose out of one of the latter.

Jacobi's were producing some tool or other, the design of which was exclusive to themselves. They had, so Isaac told me when he gave me the details of the affair, spent years of development on it; and it held a special place in the market. I know little about these things but I believe it was some form of portable drill. To Isaac's surprise he found one day that another concern was marketing a product precisely similar to his own.

This was a serious matter, and he immediately had it thoroughly investigated. Eventually he found that Heinrich Leinz, a draughtsman in the design department, had handed over a complete set of drawings to the rival firm. Jacobi was thunderstruck. He had always liked this particular young man, who had seemed quiet, unassuming, concerned with nothing but his work. He sent for Leinz and talked sternly to him, but it made no impression. The man seemed unable to grasp that he had done anything wrong. Then Isaac outlined the penalties that Leinz had brought upon himself. He would, of course, lose his job instantly. More than that, he would find himself in the law courts faced with an action for breach of contract. Leinz had joined the firm on a special signed agreement undertaking to keep his employers' information secret—as most designers and confidential research men are in all countries.

Still Leinz remained unimpressed. On the whole, he gave Isaac the impression that he was quite indifferent to threats or penalties. His patience gone, Isaac sent the man to the cashier and told him he need not report for work again.

That same evening, Herr Joerg, more military, more aggressive, more insolent than ever called at Isaac's house. Sensing trouble—he had learnt as much as that—Isaac saw him at once.

"And so," said Joerg, "you have not yet come to understand, Master Jew, that you must not meddle with our affairs."

"How have I done so now?" said Isaac wearily. He was tired of this sort of thing.

"You have not only dismissed one of our Party members—Herr Leinz—but you have threatened him with serious penalties."

"I did not know he was one of your Party members, and as for the penalties, he broke his contract and has brought serious embarrassment to my company. If I were to let that pass, anyone might see his way to earn a few clandestine marks by disposing of the results of the research for which I have paid."

"You are very dense, Herr Jacobi. No, you see only your own personal profit. But then you are a Jew, of course. Herr Leinz has rendered a great service to the country, *mein Herr*—and he has done so on our orders."

"I do not follow you, Herr Joerg."

"That tool had become essential to most of the engineering plants in the country—particularly to the all-important aircraft ones. It is not right that all the profits should go to one person—especially if that person is a Jew."

Jacobi stared at him in astonishment. The argument was an odd combination of the dictatorial and the naïve.

"There were other methods of spreading manufacture," he returned mildly. He knew the value of keeping his temper under control. "As a matter of fact, negotiations for manufacture under licence of this particular product were already far advanced."

"That would not alter the position." Joerg's mouth set evilly. "You would derive profit from the licences—and it is criminal that profits from something of national importance should come to a Jew."

Jacobi said nothing.

"I hope you are convinced. But it does not matter. You will certainly be convinced in due time." Joerg smiled slightly. "You must reinstate Herr Leinz without any sort of liability."

Isaac's temper rose, but he mastered it with an effort.

"I must consult my fellow directors on that," he said very firmly. "We regard this matter as very serious."

Joerg shrugged. "It makes no difference to us what you do," he remarked. "Your day is nearly over."

It was not often that Jacobi conferred with his directors in anything but a nominal way. Usually he made the decisions and where it was necessary, the board gave its formal approval. But now he felt that he needed support. He called a board meeting for that evening, and put the case to them briefly.

"My feeling, gentlemen," he said, "is that this sort of thing has gone far enough. If we reinstate this man our authority is irrevocably gone. These ruffians have no right to interfere with our business, and the time has come for us to take active and aggressive steps to let them know it."

To his surprise his announcement was greeted with expressions of horror.

"The times are abnormal," said one of the directors. "I don't think it would be wise to do anything like that."

"But why? We must maintain control in our own house."

The other shook his head. "I know, I know. But in these days . . ." He spread his hands expressively. "I'm thinking of the Brücher case."

"I didn't have time to study that. Tell me about it." Isaac was impressed, against his will, by the man's reluctance —a reluctance that amounted almost to fright.

"I know Herr Brücher well. He had a case with a workman of some kind—a good Brown Shirt whom he dismissed. He refused to reinstate him when the local Party demanded it, and he held out against all threats. Within a month, he had lost contracts worth a couple of million marks. Poor, poor Brücher! Today he is almost at his wit's end. You see, these Nazis are being backed by all the big industrialists—there's no doubt about that—and you know what that can

mean. It would be risking bankruptcy, disaster, if we fall foul of these hooligans."

Isaac pursed his lips. "What do you other gentlemen think?" he asked. He knew from their faces what their answer would be, and his heart sank. It was terrible that he, who had fought his way resolutely to the top, should be defeated by a group of terrorists.

There were three others. Each supported their fellow director in opposing Isaac's suggestion. They were afraid. They realized they could exist only for so long as the Nazis were prepared to tolerate them.

"So your opinion, gentlemen, is that we should sit back and take orders?" Isaac said, unable to resist the slight sarcasm.

"We have to accept the conditions of the times." The director shrugged, rather helplessly.

Isaac went away tasting for the first time the bitter fruit of defeat. It was not so much that the Nazis had interfered successfully yet again in his business as that his own directors had turned against him. Never before had they so much as questioned the wisdom of a course he had suggested. It was that, more than anything else, which rankled. And it was yet another testimony to the increasing grip of the Nazis on the nation.

In the upshot, Leinz was reinstated; and from that point, Isaac felt he was steadily losing all control over the business to which he had given the whole of his thought and energy over many years. It was as though his own children had deserted him.

Nor was it only in direct ways like this that the Nazis influenced his affairs. He found growing difficulties in making new contracts and even in renewing those of long standing with customers whom he had known for years. They were full of regrets and apologies. They were refusing him against their better judgment, but . . . Things were not normal. The times were out of joint. He was a Jew

and it was increasingly dangerous to do business with a Jew....

So the grim state of affairs went on. Every day the shadow lengthened. It was no revolution when, on January 30th, 1933, Hitler became Chancellor of the German Reich. His Party had been in effectual, if not nominal, power for a long time, and what followed was merely a stepping up and intensification of what had gone before and was already familiar to the German people. Jew baiting in Germany did not start with the coming of the first Nazi Ministry.

But even then, when the mass flight of the Jews from another and greater persecution than any in their chequered history had reached full flood, Isaac Jacobi thought he was reasonably safe. He believed that he still had time to settle his affairs and make a studied exit from the country in which he had been born, and to which, like other German Jews, he had always felt that he owed allegiance. If anyone had asked him his nationality, he would, only a year before, have replied 'German', but now the country of his origin denied him. He and his fellows were outcasts.

Isaac's misplaced faith was built on two things: one was the fact that he still possessed considerable sums in foreign currency, which he believed to be safe from the Nazis; the other was that his factory was employed almost exclusively now on production for war—something on which first emphasis was laid in the whole of the Nazi policy. And among the fantastic events around him he found glimpses of hope that did nothing to weaken his faith in the luck that had brought him through to his present position.

He was a man who never took things at their face value, and that fact may have led him to belittle the Nazi doctrine of extermination of the Jews. It was perhaps, he felt, too absurd to be real. And the case of Emil Kohl confirmed this view.

Emil Kohl was a brilliant technician who had come to Jacobi's some years before as a recently qualified engineer

and had risen rapidly through his outstanding genius as a designer. He had produced a revolutionary series of machine tools that were of the utmost value in speeding up aircraft production, and he was at work on certain improvements that would make them even more efficient.

Kohl was a Jew—or, rather, he was a half-Jew, his mother having come of a farmer's family that had been established in Bavaria for many generations. Jacobi's employed a good many Jews, and with the coming of the Nazis, a fair number of them had left the country. Early in 1933, seeing the way things were going and having made his plans carefully, Kohl prepared to follow their example. A good job awaited him in America, where he had relations and friends.

But the Nazis intervened. It was not, of course, unusual for them to stop the emigration of Jews on whom they wished to work out their spite, but in Kohl's case the whole position was different. They wanted him not as a victim, but as a key man in the development of their air-power, on which they were building their high hopes of world domination. He was essential to them, for though another engineer might have been able to pick up Kohl's work where he had left off, there would be delay—and the Nazis did not want any avoidable delay in their rearmament programme, particularly in its aeronautical aspect. Yet publicly they could not admit that a Jew was indispensable to them. And the fact that Kohl was not a full-blooded Jew did not help them; with a Jewish father he still contravened their racial laws.

Their way out of this impasse was their usual mixture of childishness and casuistry. A high Party official called on Kohl's mother. He told her, in the greatest detail, the penalties that attended the mere fact of Jewish blood in the Nazi Reich. Further, he put it to her that she did not wish to see her son needlessly and unjustly made to suffer.

With this, she was in full agreement. She had seen

suffering in her own family, and the full force of the programme had not been reached. But she replied that he was ready and in fact anxious to leave the country.

"There is no need for that if you will speak the truth, Frau Kohl," said the Nazi.

"If I tell the truth?" she echoed, completely puzzled.

"Come, Frau Kohl, do not be so dense. Jacob Kohl is not the father of Emil. Thirty years ago or so, you had an affair with a certain Prussian of pure Aryan blood. Emil was the fruit of that passion, and you married Jacob Kohl, Jew though he was, to save your honour and ensure the baby's future."

She wanted to laugh, but she realized the man was in deadly earnest.

"But that is not true. I admit that I loved Heinrich von Thalle, but Emil is not his son. You have but to look . . ."

"Frau Kohl, I know it is difficult to revive the past and all its memories—difficult and painful. But think of what is at stake. I am here as your friend—the friend of an unfortunate German girl who succumbed to the blandishments of one of these infernal Jews and married him. We Nazis cannot abandon our principles. Unless you admit the truth, we must brand Emil as a Jew and send him to a concentration camp. Let us admit that he is a brilliant man and we do not wish to do this. He can and should serve the Fatherland."

She saw the threat. She knew something—but not all; few know that, even today—of what happened in concentration camps. And Emil was her only son. His father had died seven years before.

"Well," she said slowly, "what do I do?"

"Ah, that is better, Frau Kohl!" The Nazi official beamed. "It is all very simple. You write an open letter to your son telling the truth about his parentage and that he is not tainted with Jewish blood. You say you are glad to be able to lift this horrible stigma from him which has tortured him

so long—the thought that he belongs to that accursed race. Take paper and pen. I will dictate."

She did as she was told and he began to read to her from a note-book. Half-way through the 'confession' she was on the point of refusing. The whole thing was preposterous, dishonest, a tragic farce. The Nazi official sensed her sudden wavering and gave her a keen look.

"There are thousands of people who would be overjoyed at this opportunity," he remarked casually. "Perhaps one or two declined it and are now reflecting on their stupidity in one of our rest camps."

She wrote on . . .

A week later the letter appeared in all the local papers under the heading 'An Open Letter to My Son'. When she saw the words in print, she wanted to hide her head in shame, for she had loved her husband, and Emil had been a constant reminder to her of him. But it had saved Emil. He was now officially an Aryan. It was far better to be a bastard than a Jew. And when he had recovered from the first shock, he did not mind much. He went into one of the secret State planning departments with an important official position. He was beyond reproach, for even if friends and strangers looked wonderingly at his distinctly Jewish features, he could produce his certificate of Aryan blood, and the Nazi racial experts could make no mistakes. They were infallible—like gods and fools.

Reflecting on instances like this, Isaac Jacobi felt that he had time to complete his plans. He was useful still to the Nazis. His business had been so much his own affair that he could not be wrested from it suddenly without the risk of disaster. For a little while at least, the Nazis would find some way of safeguarding his position. He was prepared to trust his enemies because he believed that for the moment his interests and theirs were identical.

## CHAPTER IX

### DISASTER

ISAAC JACOBI's estimate of his relative safety was probably the biggest and most tragic blunder he ever made in the whole of his successful career. Looking back, it sometimes seems to me that success and position had in some mysterious way blunted his perception and dulled his powers of judgment, for it is certain that, if he had had during those years in which I knew him so well, the same powers of discretion as had built up his business he would never have committed two such flagrant mistakes as trusting the Nazis to be false to the anti-Jewish dogmas or believing in the character and constancy of Otto Wetzel. As well might he have put his trust in the immutability of a weather-vane.

It was through Otto that the first of the final blows came to be delivered. When Otto Wetzel and Else had departed, after their protracted honeymoon, to Baden-Baden, where Otto was resuming his practice among the wealthy hypochondriac visitors, I dismissed them from my mind. Definitely I was not interested in Wetzel. He annoyed me and irritated me; despite his undoubted brilliance, he typified all that was least desirable in a doctor—and I had no wish to be classed among his friends. But, as a regular and frequent visitor to the Jacobi household, I could not escape him. He and Else came for occasional short stays and sometimes I wondered how it was that he was able to leave his practice so often. And of course, in between whiles, Margaret was always full of news of Else, derived from the latter's daily and voluminous letters.

At first, all went well. To judge from the extracts read to me from the letters, Else had found in Otto the ideal husband.

He was so kind, so loving, so generous; and in his career he seemed to go forward by leaps and bounds. No doubt aided by the handsome dowry he had received, he had opened a clinic in Baden-Baden. He had two assistants. The most distinguished people, both Germans and foreigners, came to see him.

All this went on for some little time. And then references to Otto grew rather fewer. A cynic might suggest that that was inevitable and that the surprising thing was that the lyrical passages had been maintained for so long. But it was not so much evidence that Else was settling down; there was distinct hints that actual difficulties were arising. This was soon after the Nazis became the effectual power in the land to the exclusion of the legitimate Government.

One letter that Else wrote stands out in my memory. I did not consciously make a note of it at the time, but later it came back to me with startling clarity. I could see again Margaret's puzzled expression as she read it out to me—I was never allowed to touch these holy documents—and I could catch the undertone of anxiety in her voice. Else was writing of the Nazis.

"Of course," she wrote, "these are very worrying times for Otto. I sometimes feel rather ashamed of myself, for it is an undoubted embarrassment as things are for him to have a partly Jewish wife. Many of his wealthiest and most influential patients are sympathizers with the National Socialists, as they call themselves, and I dare say you know that they are not kindly disposed towards Jews. But I think this is only a passing phase. There has always been this anti-Jew bias in Germany. When things get normal again, everyone will forget about it."

That optimistic view was shared by a good many who thought the Nazis only a passing disorder that time would cure. So far as Else was concerned, the difficulties increased. She spoke of Otto's kindness to her now as though it was a magnificent condescension on his part so much as to take

notice of her. Obviously she was being made to feel her condition acutely. And then came the news that Otto—as might have been foretold—had formed very valuable connexions with the local Nazi potentates. That was on the very eve of Hitler's appointment as Chancellor. This, curiously enough, gave Else some hope. She spoke of Otto's being now in a favourable position to deal with the unfortunate state of affairs.

I heard no more about this affair for a little while. I do not know if Margaret thought it better to keep news to herself or Else herself ceased to refer to it. Then one day I arrived at the Jacobis' house to be received by Isaac himself, looking extremely grave.

"I'm glad you've come, George," he said. "I'd like you to have a look at Margaret. She's had a great shock, I'm afraid."

"Oh?"

He nodded. "Yes—we've had rather startling news from Otto and Else. He"—he gulped, as though the words stuck in his throat—"He's divorced her."

"The deuce he has!" I exclaimed. "But surely— On what grounds?" But even as I spoke the words, I realized why.

"Because . . ." Isaac was at an unusual loss for words. "Well, under these idiotic race laws—the Nuremberg decrees or whatever they call them. Apparently he can divorce Else because she has a Jewish father—in fact, he's been encouraged to, as befits a good Aryan German."

I did not know what to say.

"He's written quite a nice letter," said Isaac apologetically, "but of course that doesn't alter the state of affairs."

"It certainly doesn't," I returned grimly. "Where's Margaret?"

I found her in much the same condition as she had been when she had first had news of Otto Wetzel, and I prescribed very similar treatment. There is not much room

for experiment in treating cases of severe psychic shock. I did what I could and returned to Isaac.

In the next few days, following Else's return, I pieced together the whole story. Otto had seen clearly which way the wind was going to change and had begun to trim his sails accordingly. First of all, he had made himself specially ingratiating to those rich people who were secretly backing the Nazi cause. Then he made direct contacts with the Nazi leaders themselves. Finally, and inevitably, as soon as Hitler's success seemed certain, he joined the Nazi Party. Just as surely, if the weather had turned otherwise, he would have become a good Communist. Else's position was now intolerable. He did not hesitate to remind her of her good fortune in being allowed to remain beneath his roof. The handicap she was to his career was constantly pointed out to her. But she still loved her Otto and she clung to him tenaciously. Neither hints nor veiled threats produced the result for which he had no doubt been aiming: she did not leave him of her own free will. She would have been prepared, I think, to serve as his scullery-maid so long as she could have stayed in the same house with him and heard his voice.

And so at last he was forced to take overt action. He invoked the Nazi race laws and applied for a divorce, which was willingly and instantaneously granted. From his own point of view, it was quite a good move, since it won him increased favour with the Nazi masters he was now so assiduously serving. At first, Else was quite unable to comprehend. She made no move to leave the house and went about her domestic duties as before. Once again, then, his hand was forced. He ordered her maid to pack her trunks, booked her ticket to Hanover, and virtually threw her out of the house. I can imagine him breathing a sigh of relief and even mopping the perspiration from his brow as he watched the car depart for the station. Precisely how Else behaved on this occasion, I do not know, but I cannot

imagine that she accepted things very quietly. Not at all aggressive in most matters, she was unusually pertinacious in her longing for Otto.

Otto had written a nice letter, Isaac had said. I was told about it, though I never saw it. He had told Isaac that the position had been thrust upon him, and that his whole future depended upon his freeing himself from his Jewish connexions, which had already done him a not inconsiderable amount of harm. He had never taken a step more reluctantly or with greater regret. And he asked, not unnaturally, in the light of all the circumstances, that Isaac should destroy that letter when he had read it. It would not have been at all a nice thing to fall into the hands of a Nazi agent.

But this letter served only to appease Isaac temporarily. As soon as Else returned, he flew into a violent rage and went about breathing hatred and vengeance for Otto Wetzel. Yet even so he still retained a certain faith in the man's integrity. Otto had made no mention of returning the dowry, either in whole or in part, but Isaac took this as a matter of course. The man was too concerned with the emotional side of the business at first and did not like to raise financial details—that was Isaac's view.

"I hate the very sound of his name," he remarked to me one day in this connexion, "but at any rate he's a gentleman. He thinks it would be indelicate to talk about money just now."

But the days and weeks went on and still no word on the subject came from Otto Wetzel. At length and with some reluctance, Isaac wrote him a short note suggesting that the time had now come for the matter to be settled. The reply, which arrived after a little delay, rather shocked Isaac. Briefly, Otto took the line of an outraged innocent. It had never occurred to him that Isaac would expect the return of any of the money. That had been a free gift, openly made, and so on, and so on.

Isaac wrote again, pointing out that this was his daughter's marriage portion and that in all the circumstances he felt entitled to the return of some of it. This time, the reply was even more shattering. Wetzel did not propose to return anything. The money had been a gift to him personally. Where was the marriage agreement? There was none—it had all been a friendly arrangement. And then, at the tail of this letter, came the Nazi arrogance. Only a damned Jew would seek to have money given like this sent back to him. All he cared about was the money. And in any event the money was far better as it was than in the hands of a Jew.

Once more, but rather despairingly, Isaac sent a letter. This time he threatened legal proceedings for recovery—a step I viewed with some misgiving, I must admit, for if it had been made I should almost certainly be called as a witness. Already I knew enough of the Nazis to have no wish to be concerned with their anti-semitic feuds. This time the reply was sheer Nazi. Otto Wetzel denied all liability. He told Isaac he was fortunate to be where he was, after all this time, but if he went about threatening members of the Party with illegal claims—claims that no Nazi court would allow a Jew to succeed in—his days were numbered.

Isaac's last illusion was now gone. He was beginning to feel like a rat in a trap—and a trap that he himself had, to some extent, assisted to make and set. He did not need Otto Wetzel to suggest to him that his days were numbered. Every week he felt his doom creeping more closely upon him. He was no longer master in his factory. There was a Nazi nominee always at his elbow, watching him with the air of a man waiting for the victim to make the inevitable false step. One by one his own personal secrets of this business had been wrung from him. In only a little while the last would be surrendered, and then he would be no longer any use at all to the Nazis. The shadow of the

concentration camp was already upon him. He began to look like a hunted man, and his face, never healthy looking, took on a strange and permanent pallor.

They sent for him one night. Four Brown Shirts arrived at one in the morning and tore him from his bed. This was the usual technique, to fall upon an enemy when he was in a state to admit everything. He was taken off to the local Brown House.

It was winter and the nights were long. It wanted seven hours till dawn, but until the first streak of light washed the sky, the Nazis questioned him, writing down his answers, bullying him, extracting statements from him that, in the normal way, he would have phrased very differently even if he had thought of making them at all. Then they took him to a cell that was no more than a cupboard—a cell that had neither chair nor table in it, and was so small that he could not even lie full-length upon the floor, but had to curl himself up, like a dog on the hearthrug.

There they left him, sending him the barest of essential food about midday. And meanwhile some other Nazis went to the house and began talking to Margaret. They told her frankly that her husband was on their list, that his time of freedom was over, but that they had not yet decided on his destiny. His was a difficult case and it would have to be considered by high authority. But meantime there was her position to be considered. She was not a Jewess. They had examined her lineage carefully and they could find no taint of Israel anywhere in it. She was just another of those unfortunate, gullible women on whom these fiendish Jews had worked their evil ways. Because of that, there was no need for her to share the fate, at present undecided, of her husband. The door to freedom—to respectable citizenry of the New Reich—was open to her. Under the laws she could divorce her husband without trouble. The Nazi officer had the necessary papers with him, merely needing her signature.

These laws were already only too grimly familiar to Margaret. It was through them that her only daughter had suffered. She did not propose to make use of them. Why should she deny her husband in his hour of trial? He had been a good husband to her. Everything she had ever wanted had been hers for the asking. He had given her a lovely home, had cared for her children, had denied her nothing.

She told the Nazis all this with a quiet determination. They opened their eyes.

"But he is a Jew," they insisted. "That alone is a horrible crime. No decent German woman could possibly go on associating with a Jew, even in name. In the old days there was perhaps some excuse. A certain rottenness had descended on the country, started by these devils themselves. But now the Führer has revealed the truth, you cannot remain deaf and blind. Your course is clear. You have to choose between the Third Reich and our Führer, whom God has sent to deliver us, on the one hand, and a Jew on the other. There is only one choice a true German can make."

Margaret drew herself up. She could be cold and dignified on occasion. Perhaps unconsciously she had absorbed something of the aristocratic manner in the house where she had been brought up.

"I agree with you, *mein Herr*," she replied frigidly, and he smiled in spite of her manner: they all gave in at last, he thought. "I most certainly agree with you that there is only one thing a true German woman can do. That is to abide by her plighted word given before God—her pledge to stand by her husband for better and for worse, to succour him in trouble and care for him in his need. A good German wife does not desert her husband simply because someone else, whether it be a person or a political party, tells her she should. If it should be my fate to suffer with Isaac, then I will suffer, at your hands or anyone else's. I am not afraid.

I cannot change the habits and convictions of a lifetime. You may go, *mein Herr*—you have my answer, and nothing will induce me to change it."

The Nazi officer glowered. To begin with he disliked being told to go; it was his right to decide when he should go and when he should remain, especially in the house of a Jew. And he did not like this woman's *hauteur*. It made him a little embarrassed, for he had all the middle-class German's respect for the aristocracy, and say what he might, he could not deny that she did come from a very ancient family.

"I do not think you understand all the implications," he returned curtly. "It is not only your husband who is involved. There is, too, your son . . ."

He paused, noting with pleasure that she blanched a little.

"If you will divorce this Jew whom you married, it might be that we could lighten the penalties that will fall on your son because of his race. There are ways and means."

Margaret's heart beat a little faster. Werner! she thought; what will they do to him, so young, so carefree, so brilliant? And then her courage returned.

Again she drew herself up.

"I cannot alter my decision, *mein Herr*," she said quietly. "I cannot break the promise I have made to God because you threaten me. If it is His Will that I suffer, then suffer I must, and He will fulfil His purpose. There are powers greater even than those of your Führer, and your Party. My answer is 'No'."

He left without another word. For days she waited for his return, but he did not come. The summons in the middle of the night she so dreaded—that summons that took people into oblivion did not fall.

Often in later years Margaret went over that scene with me till I can see it as clearly as if I had been there. She

told the story with a quiet dramatic force, and the details, the very words of the conversation, were always the same. It had burnt itself into her memory so that nothing she could do would ever efface it. Perhaps it was the one moment in her life when she came near to greatness of spirit.. I think she must have been above herself. But who can probe the secrets of the human soul acting in desperate emergency, forced with a choice between self-interest and safety and loyalty? It's often the meekest and most docile who, in the moment of trial, show the most determination, the greatest staunchness, and the highest courage. Perhaps the very Nazis respected her steadfastness, since they did not come and bear her off.

For five days Isaac languished in his cell-cupboard, seeing no one but the surly-faced janitor who brought him his daily weak soup and coarse bread. The only remark this man ever made was that Isaac should consider himself lucky to get any food at all; it was waste of good food to give it to a Jew, who was no good at all, alive or dead, while even dead pigs could be made into meat and sausages.

On the sixth day, he was hauled forth with the minimum of gentleness and taken, breakfastless, into the cold, grey dawn. He was thrown into a half-open motor-truck and driven fast over rough roads for more than an hour. Before he had been admitted to the vehicle, his eyes had been bandaged, so that he was unable to see where he was going—a precaution that amused him by its childishness, terrible though his predicament was; and when the bandage was removed he had no difficulty at all in recognizing the house to which he had been taken as that of an old business friend to which he had been many, many times. This was typical of the schoolboy-secret-society technique of the Nazis, who seek always first to intimidate their victims into helplessness. Their methods, in fact, have very much in common with those of the savages who wear war-paint and fearsome masks to terrorize their enemies.

Isaac was not a little surprised to find this familiar house converted into a Nazi headquarters of some sort, but this was as nothing to the astonishment he felt when he was marched into the room he had known so well as the music-room, now doing duty as a superior sort of office or committee-room. At the far end was a desk, facing down the room, and behind it a man in a resplendent Nazi uniform. On either side of him stood guards, rigidly at attention. Other officials sat at a long table at the side of the room. Behind the desk was a large swastika flag and the inevitable outsize portrait of Hitler. So far, the setting was one with which the illustrated newspapers and propaganda sheets had made him familiar. But it was the man himself who interested Isaac. There could be no doubt about it. He was Karl Wahrling, the former friend to whom the house belonged—a man to whom Isaac had confided many secrets and with whom he had spent many an entertaining and profitable evening. At one time, indeed, they had been fellow directors of a certain company.

There was no sign of recognition on Wahrling's face, which was hard and cold. That ruthlessness which had served him so well in business was finding a new outlet. For a moment, Isaac did not know what to do, and then, recovering his wits, he took his cue from that cruel mask before him. They were no longer friends or even business rivals. They were now, according to the law of the land, members of entirely different worlds—the one a high official of the ruling caste of the *Herrenvolk*, the other a captive of the accursed, damned nation of Israel.

Wahrling cast one intimidating glance at Isaac and then looked inquiringly at the officer in charge of Isaac's escort. The latter stepped forward, clicked his heels and raised his hand in the Nazi salute.

"Isaac Jacobi, *Herr Obergruppenführer*," he reported. "You have his dossier."

"*Ach, so.* Isaac Jacobi, the Jew business man and industrialist. Bring him closer."

Isaac was marched forward three or four paces. Wahrling raked him coldly with his eyes, and then, picking up a sheet of paper, began a fusillade of questions. Not one of Isaac's answers was accepted without testing and probing, so that even Isaac's lucid mind began to grow confused. He was examined more particularly about his holdings of foreign currency, its value, its nature, and its place of deposit. From time to time, during the interrogation, Wahrling referred to another sheet of paper, as though comparing Isaac's answers with information already obtained.

After ninety minutes, Isaac was taken away and thrown back into the truck. He was not blindfolded this time, but the curtain at the back was let down and laced together. The journey on this occasion occupied only fifteen minutes, and the roads traversed were smooth. Obviously the direct route had been taken.

For three days more, Isaac remained cooped up in his cell. Then he was once more put in the lorry and driven to the house. This time, Wahrling was not alone at the table; he had with him another official, apparently of even higher rank.

It was the latter who did all the talking.

"Isaac Jacobi," he said, "we have investigated your affairs with the greatest thoroughness, for though, as a Jew, you can claim no rights in the Third Reich, we wish the whole world to see the fairness of Nazi justice. Yours is an unsavoury record, even for a Jew's. For many years now you have bled the German people in order that you might grow fat and wealthy. Those days, Isaac Jacobi, are now over. In the war of 1914-1918, you were one of those who helped to stab the country in the back, for you turned the trials and sufferings of the Fatherland to your own personal profit. When the German people, groaning under an unjust peace into which they had been betrayed by treachery, starved,

you were rich. You took your money out of the country at the time of the financial crisis and you used it, when the opportunity arose, to deprive Germans of their lawful property. And that money, to start with, was won at the price of German blood on the battlefields.

"Since the war, you have never hesitated to turn every trouble of the German people to your own advantage. You have laid aside secrets that would have helped the Fatherland because you wished to hold them till a bigger price could be obtained. Your whole record is black and terrible. More than that, you have personally insulted members of the Nazi Party. By a trick, you betrayed a German into marrying your daughter, and when he, as befitted a good German, divorced her to free himself from the stinking taint of Jewry, you threatened him for the return of money which you alleged was your daughter's.

"Even now you have rich possessions in other countries, profits made out of the German people, which you are trying to withhold from those who should benefit by them—the German people from whom you wrung them.

"Your guilt needs no further proof. Accordingly, you will be deprived of all property of whatever kind you may possess within the frontiers of the German Reich, and you will also sign documents, which have been prepared, instructing the foreign bankers who hold your external assets to transfer them to the credit of the Government of the Third German Reich."

Isaac went numb. Even to the last, I believe, he trusted that his luck would hold and that he would save something of his overseas assets. Now, even that fantastic hope was crushed. Ruin, absolute ruin, stared him in the face. For a brief moment, he told me, he thought of refusing to sign the transfer of his funds, and then realization of what so foolish a step would involve came over him. He knew that in his confined cell he had been relatively well treated. The

nightmare of the concentration camp and the torture chamber came up before his eyes. He reeled slightly and recovered himself.

"*Ja, mein Herr,*" he said.

The high official nodded slightly.

"Very well. We must now consider your personal destiny. In view of your record, there is very little to be said for you, but you have endeavoured to make some slight reparation at the last minute for your untold crimes against the German people by voluntarily assigning all your assets to the Reich. If you had not done that, you would have been compelled to pay your part of the price which your swinish people owe to the German people, whom you have robbed and pillaged for so long. As it is, we are prepared to be lenient and to treat you with a clemency your record by itself hardly merits. We shall suspend your final arrest for forty-eight hours. No restrictions on your movements will be imposed during that period, either within or without the Reich. But if you are found within the borders of the Fatherland at the expiration of the period, which will begin at midnight, you will have to suffer the full penalties. In your absence, they will be levied on any member of your family, whose movements also will be free during the period of grace."

The guards seized Isaac's arms and marched him out. His head was in a whirl. He had lost everything he possessed, but he had been given a slender chance of escape. The official's meaning had been clear. He was being ordered to leave the country. But he was not to be deported. The Fatherland would do nothing to help him out, even if it would not obstruct him. Forty-eight hours! It was not long, yet perhaps it was time enough. He had friends beyond the frontiers who would help him only too gladly—provided he could get to them. But there were difficulties. It was true, apparently, that the German guards at the frontier would let him through, but would the guards on the other

side—Dutch, French, Belgian, Swiss—let him in? And not merely him, but Margaret, Else, Werner? The case was desperate. He could do nothing but put the problem to the practical test.

In the meantime, he was not left alone. He was taken back to the Brown House and, after a short interval in his cell, he was dragged into the office of the local S.A. commander. Here he found documents awaiting him—documents assigning all he had in foreign banks, in foreign bonds, in foreign private enterprises, to the Nazi Reich; and in each document it was written that he did so freely and ‘as an act of reparation, tardy and insignificant, for the wrongs he had done to the German people’.

His hand shook as he took the pen. Again, for a fleeting moment, the thought of refusing to sign away the product of a lifetime’s hard work flashed through his mind. But there were Margaret and Else and Werner—and over them, as well, hung the dreadful shadow of the concentration camp and the unknown torture. . . .

So, at last, they set him free. He hastened to his room. In broken sentences he told Margaret and his children all that had happened. Margaret took it with quiet resignation. Her courage was equal to the crisis.

“Let us go, then, Isaac,” she said.

They paid me the compliment of calling on me and giving me a full account of all that had happened. It was a risky thing to do—for them, because it wasted some of their valuable time; for me, because the Nazis had their inquisitive eye on anyone, especially foreigners, who had dealings with Jews. And that was the last I saw of them in Germany. News reached me a fortnight later that they had successfully crossed into Holland.

There, it seemed, their story ended for me. I have to confess I did not think about it much at the time. In conditions where such things are almost commonplace, it is difficult to see their horror in its full immensity. Besides,

I had other things to worry me. I myself was on the point of departure. England was my goal—the goal to which I had been working for so long. And now the time had come. I was not being forced to leave, but to remain I would have to pay a price I would not consider. I could not render even lip service to the Nazi creed. My concern was with life, not with death.

**ENGLAND**



## CHAPTER X

### WE MEET AGAIN

I CAME to England in 1933, and in the period that followed far too much happened to me to permit of much thought about the Jacobis. Often, it is true, I would wonder about old friends I had met in Germany and try to imagine how they were living. Occasionally news reached me of this person or that. Sometimes it was good news, and I was glad. Sometimes it was bad news, and I grieved. Worst of all was the grim silence that surrounded some people of whom I sought news. They might be alive or they might be dead; they might be in that state of living death which existed in Hitler's concentration camps.

Though I had seen much of the Jacobis, I had never been truly intimate with them. With Isaac I had no immediate points of contact; his ways were not mine, for I have never been able to see eye to eye with the successful business man. Each trade, profession and calling, has, I suppose, its own code of ethics, written or unwritten, and it did so happen that the code of the profession to which I belong ill accords with that of the business world. With Margaret I had been more on the level of an intimate, but in those days she was absorbed in her husband and her home, and one never quite lost the impression that, as a visitor, one was somehow a purely temporary and relatively unimportant item in her scheme of things. As for the children, I never saw very much of them. During those years when I was a frequent caller at the Jacobis' house, Werner spent most of his time studying either at universities or abroad, while Else plunged headlong into disastrous matrimony.

There is, then, perhaps some excuse for me if I made no inquiries about the Jacobis and permitted them to go out of my mind, apart from an occasional memory.

Some strange trick of Fate, however, seemed to have tangled the thread of my life with that of the Jacobis, and it was not so very long before they walked again into my life. And once again it was distress and trouble that provided the setting. So it always seems to have been. I met Margaret first when she was in the depths of anxiety about her boy. I said good-bye to them when destiny appeared to have thrown the whole of its weight against them. I met Margaret once more when she was again worried about her child.

By 1935 I had become acclimatized not to the English weather—a feat no one born outside these islands ever achieves—but to the English way of life, and particularly to the particular tribal customs of the medical profession. I had, after some time in the provinces, come to London and managed to secure an honorary appointment to a certain hospital. It was one attended by large numbers of the foreign colony in London, and my knowledge of languages was distinctly useful.

One day, not so very long after my appointment there, I was passing along one of the corridors when I was stopped by a rather worried-looking nurse.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I wonder if you'd mind just looking in there"—she pointed to a small anteroom in which patients and visitors were sometimes put for privacy. "There's a woman in there—a relative—and she's terribly cut up. She was upsetting the others, so I brought her away from the general waiting-room. There's really nothing wrong with her—just nerves."

"What's the case?" I asked.

"Tonsils," replied the nurse briefly, adding: "Mr Bulstrode is operating."

I nodded. He was a good man, the operation was not serious, and there should be no cause at all for alarm. As

I made my way to the little room, from which came sounds of muffled weeping, I could not help thinking of the unreasonableness of human nature as exemplified in patients' relatives. They are the first to cry out if treatment is withheld, but if treatment is given they rarely fail to raise difficulties.

As I entered the room I saw that the woman was in a really bad way. She had worked herself into a state bordering on hysteria. She sat on one of the hard wooden chairs, her head bowed in her hands, which held a sodden handkerchief. For a little while she took no notice of my entry—perhaps she had not heard it.

"Let me try and help you," I said, adding rather unnecessarily: "I am a doctor."

Slowly she looked up. I started. The eyes were red and swollen, the whole face was racked with unhappiness, yet there could be no mistaking those features.

"Margaret!" I exclaimed. "Margaret Jacobi!"

In her turn she, too, was astounded. She dropped her hands and her weeping stopped.

"George!" she said. "George Sava—no, it can't be."

"But it is," I replied, glad that the surprise of seeing me had done something to calm her by taking her mind off her immediate troubles. "I've been in England for some time now—over a couple of years—and I am a surgeon here."

"Why didn't they tell me?" she said, her worry returning. "If I had known, I might not be so worried about Else."

"There is nothing to worry about," I put in quickly. "They have told me all about the case. The operation itself is not serious, and in Mr Bulstrode there is one of the best of the younger surgeons in London. Naturally, you are anxious, but I assure you this great distress is quite groundless."

"I am glad you have said that, George," she said slowly. "I think it relieves my mind a little. I know I should not have been so worried if you had been operating."

"That is very nice of you, Margaret," I returned. "But Else is having the best possible attention. It could not be better."

"Thank you again, George. I don't think you are being merely reassuring. You see, I know so little about English surgeons."

I smiled. I have come across that attitude so frequently, yet it is quite misplaced. English surgeons, so far from calling themselves 'Professor', are merely labelled with that 'Mr' which applies to all ordinary men, and this misleads foreigners. On the other hand, English people seem to have a fatal belief in the quality of foreign surgeons; almost anyone with an unusual name of Continental origin, masquerading as a visiting specialist is looked upon as infallible. Never were prophets so much without honour in their own country as in England. Their very fine dancers hide behind assumed Russian names; their musicians used to Germanize their titles; their painters used to go about doing their best to look like Paris apaches. Yet combined with this is a firm belief that the English are better than any other people, and that the world consists merely of themselves and others, vaguely labelled as 'foreigners', whether they come from Peru or Russia, Siam or Sicily. Truly the English are an inexplicable race.

I talked to her a little more, giving her no time to brood on her imaginary troubles. Of course, there was danger in the operation: there is no operation entirely free from risk. But this one was simple, and it was true what I had said about Bulstrode. In the war he did magnificent work in khaki.

After a little while I told the porter to fetch her a taxi, and I sent her away in a much calmer frame of mind. She had not told me much about her fortunes, but I had hardly given her the chance. I had simply talked and talked until her mind began to run in wider channels.

During the next few days I saw her several times on her daily visit to the hospital. My prognosis had been quite

accurate. The operation itself had been highly successful, and Else was rapidly building up again. She had a very sound constitution and was an ideal patient. No one could have been more pleased with the results than Else herself, and this alone restored Margaret's frayed nerves to normal.

At odd intervals I thought quite a lot about them again. Margaret must have suffered considerably to get into the state in which I had found her. She had every evidence of having used up the greater part of her nervous reserves. I remembered the anxiety in which she used to get when anything happened to her children, but this had been something more. I had the idea of going to see them, but hesitated. They were refugees, and I did not know under what conditions they were living. Margaret's clothes had been a little tired, if not actually shabby—a great contrast to the smart, expensive ones to which she had been accustomed.

About a fortnight later, I received a note at the hospital. It was from Margaret, inviting me to call one evening "to talk over old and happier times," as she put it. She warned me to expect no lavish entertainment—"a cup of coffee, a biscuit, and some cake". The address was a block of mansion flats in West Hampstead. As there was no telephone number I wrote at once in reply to say I would call the next Wednesday—a couple of days later.

The block proved to be one of those old-fashioned ones in which this part of London abounds. There was no lift and I had to toil wearily up four flights of creaky wooden stairs. And the flat itself was not palatial, though I knew sufficient about English standards by now to realize that it required a moderate income to maintain it. Obviously the Jacobis had not been reduced to dire poverty, whatever their misfortunes may have been; and equally they were a long way from the wealth in which they had previously revelled. I was curious to find out what had happened.

From that and a few subsequent visits I managed to piece together their story. They had reached friends in Holland

safely, but the Dutch authorities, too near to the growing strength of Germany, were not anxious to extend their hospitality permanently to the Jacobis. Nor had Isaac any intention of staying in that country. He wished to settle either in England or in America—preferably the former, because he did not wish to be too far from Europe. After some weeks' hard work on the part of himself and some English friends he succeeded in gaining admission to England, and already his business plans were beginning to take shape.

Quite unconsciously, he had saved something from his fortune, though only a very little. What he had signed away was all the foreign assets standing in his own name or that of his company; the documents had made no mention of anything he might hold anywhere on a joint account. Some years before, he had acquired a small interest in a factory engaged in the recovery of chemical by-products from waste material and had gone into an inactive partnership with a naturalized Austrian Jew, Josef Rosen, for the development of the English rights. The interest had been so small that he had almost forgotten it. It had been taken up not to yield any immediate profit but as a possible harvest for the future. Rosen was one of those with whom he got in touch from Holland, and did the greater part of the work in convincing the English authorities that Isaac was a potential source of profit to the country.

Isaac had taken little note of how this forgotten enterprise had progressed, but he now found that it had made tolerable strides. From the London office, a fairly large export trade was conducted. There was quite a respectable business waiting for him, and the future prospects were bright. Rosen was not alone in controlling the London company: he had as fellow director an English Jew named Solomons, with whom Isaac immediately established friendly relations.

There had been something, therefore, in Isaac's seemingly absurd trust in his luck. If he had not succeeded in saving all he had expected, at any rate he had salved enough to

keep himself and his family above the poverty level. He set to work with determination, bringing a fresh aggressive spirit into the business—something it much needed, for Rosen was almost entirely a technical man, while Solomons had many interests and could not give very much time to this particular one.

Margaret and Else had been allowed to enter the country with Isaac, but the case of Werner was more difficult. England had a difficult problem in those days. On the one hand there was the strength of the old British tradition of offering a home for refugees from Continental oppression—a tradition that still held a powerful hold. But against that was the grim fact that the country was in the grip of large-scale unemployment. London might be prosperous, but there were still those black spots up and down the country which the public referred to as ‘depressed areas’, while the Government adopted the euphemistic ‘special areas’. Moreover, even then the clouds of war were being detected on the horizon by the far-seeing, and there were plenty who questioned the wisdom of increasing the foreign population—particularly if the newcomers happened to be of German origin.

At first there was hope. Werner was given a three months permit, and he worked with his father at the London office. But this hope expired when the time came for the renewal of the permit. Perhaps authority decided that it had already done enough for the Jacobis; perhaps it was just one of those official decisions which are arrived at for what is apparently no reason at all. Werner’s permission to remain in the country was not extended.

This was a blow to Margaret, even more so than to Isaac. She was wrapped up in her children, even though they were now fully grown and might be expected to lead their own lives. But both Else and Werner clung to their parents with a fidelity that misfortune had strengthened. The decision that Werner would have to go produced a depressing effect

on the whole family, reminding them that all their troubles were by no means over.

At first, Werner thought of going to the United States, but this plan was abandoned—for what reason I was never able to discover. Eventually he was appointed as overseas representative for the company. His wide knowledge of languages specially fitted him for this position. He would not, of course, be able to visit Germany, but this was not important for no trade was done with the Reich, nor was there any possibility of its being started. It was something which did not entirely cut Werner off from the family, for he returned to London at fairly frequent intervals. And he found out that the job was congenial to him. He had something of his father's driving power, though not so pronounced, and he played no small part in helping along the rapid progress in the company's affairs which resulted from Isaac's entry into its active affairs.

Whenever I went to the Jacobis, I could not help studying them closely. They spoke little enough, naturally, of the trials they had undergone, and I could not inquire; but they had obviously changed. Margaret was much more highly strung than she had ever been. One felt that the slightest disturbance in her life would have very serious nervous reactions, and Else was no longer the rather prim, sedate girl I had known in Hanover. She did not seek any work, but remained with her mother, and I think that the thought of Otto was never far away from her. She never mentioned him in my presence, yet I would have been quite prepared to believe that if he had asked her, quite lightly, to go back to him, without offering any word of apology or regret for what had happened, she would have gone. He had been, after all, her one deep emotional experience, and it had occurred when she was very young and impressionable. She would go through life gradually building up his memory into an ever-brighter ideal till all the suffering he had caused her and her parents would have disappeared from her mind.

Isaac was grimmer than he had used to be. He had always been a hard, forceful man in business, but at home he had shown little of it, deferring in all things to his wife's wishes. But now his mouth was nearly always hard set. His speech was more brusque, and he seemed to treat everyone as an enemy till the contrary had been definitely proved. It was clear, too, that he despised the comparatively modest circumstances in which they were living. This was curious, for I had never suspected in the old days that he had loved luxury for its own sake, and had, in fact, imagined that he had had that house built more from the effect it would produce than primarily for his own comfort.

It was soon after I had first visited their flat when I had a curious sidelight on this unsuspected trait of Isaac's—or perhaps it would be more correct to describe it as a warp in his character that misfortune had produced. By then I had seen enough of the Jacobis to assess their present position in life. They were not in any want but they had little enough spare money for luxuries. When Margaret and Else went out, which they did infrequently, they lunched or dined at the less expensive restaurants and took the cheaper seats in the theatre—and they spoke of these occasional outings as great treats, not to be indulged in too often. So it was with Jacobi, so far as I could make out. He, too, clearly limited his expenses by every conceivable means.

One night, however, I was dining with friends at one of the most expensive restaurants in the West End. It was a celebration party in honour of my host's birthday, and he was a man who never cared what he spent provided he ensured the entertainment of his guests. In many ways, that was a memorable evening, but for all that the incident that remains most clearly in my mind, is the affair of Isaac Jacobi. Conversation at our table had lagged for a moment, as it so often will after a specially good meal, and I was glancing idly round the room. I was noting, almost unconsciously, as one does on these occasions, the curious

variety of people who assemble to dine and dance in this kind of restaurant.

Suddenly my eyes became focused on a single spot. It was a table in the far corner of the room, some distance away from where we were, and almost hidden by the tables in between and by the huge ornamental palm that graced the corner with the rather pathetic air of belonging to a land of brilliant sunshine and fresh air instead of strip electric lights and artificial ventilation from an air conditioner. What I saw so astonished me that at first I did not believe it, and I stared—rudely and directly.

There was no doubt about it. That man was Isaac Jacobi. And he was not alone. With him was a young woman of about twenty-six or twenty-seven, obviously Jewish, but with bleached hair that, so far from disguising her rather heavy semitic features, threw them into high relief. On the table was an ice-bucket, from which protruded the gold-foiled neck of a magnum of champagne. Isaac was entertaining on the lavish scale.

I thought of Margaret and Else and their unambitious trips to town from which they derived so much pleasure. I thought of Isaac's home where money was far from plentiful. The contrast was striking, and I smiled grimly to myself. What was the explanation, I asked myself? Was he deliberately understating his resources to his wife, or was he like so many men of his age the victim of a woman an American would unhesitatingly have described as a gold-digger and living beyond his means? Since Margaret was the greater friend, neither question yielded an answer that pleased me. Yet there was nothing I could do about it.

Nor was that the end of the incident. We left rather early, as my host wanted us all to go back to his flat, and our way out lay right past Isaac's table. The more I had thought about the situation, the less I liked it, and I saw no reason why I should take any special precautions to keep out of his

line of vision. If he came to these places, he must be prepared for the consequences—among them being seen by his friends. But as it chanced he was too absorbed in his companion to take any notice of those who walked by his table.

Just in front of us was a young couple, who every now and again looked at each other and smiled, as lovers do. Perhaps they had been celebrating their engagement. I was quite near the young man and I heard distinctly what he said.

"It's been a marvellous evening, darling," he said. "I wish we could come here oftener." And then he glanced at Isaac casually in passing. "If I was a ruddy Jew like him I'd be able to afford it—you could see by the way the waiters treated him he's a regular here."

I could not catch the reply, but the words seared themselves into my mind. So there was evidence that this was no isolated fling. Isaac Jacobi was probably an habitué of these places. The mystery deepened, and I grew so thoughtful that my host began to rail me about my seriousness and wonder what it was that had upset my digestion.

Next day, I was due at the Jacobis' flat. I went reluctantly, for I felt I was in a very awkward position. Isaac was there but he seemed quite ignorant of the fact that I had seen him the night before.

As the evening wore on, I began to forget the incident. After all, I persuaded myself, it was not my business to stir up trouble where there had already been so much. My one course, from all points of view, was to hold my tongue. And then, just as I was preparing to depart, Margaret made a remark that brought the whole thing again to the forefront of my mind.

"I always enjoy these evenings when you call, George," she said. "We seem so happy together. And I'm glad Isaac got back in time to be here—he's been away on business,

you know, in the Midlands and only arrived in London this afternoon."

To me the whole thing was now horribly plain. I made my departure as quickly as I could. Isaac Jacobi had suddenly become an extremely distasteful person to me, but it was to be some little time before the whole of the unsavoury truth was to be revealed.

## CHAPTER XI

### NEWS FROM WARSAW

My visits to the Jacobis grew rather less frequent. For one thing, my practice was growing, and I now had much less spare time on my hands. But that was not the only, nor even the chief reason. It was rather that now I no longer felt entirely at ease amongst them. My distaste for Isaac grew into something not far from active dislike, and every time I heard from Margaret that he was away on business—now in the North or Scotland, now in the West, even once in Paris—my conscience pricked me. No doubt I should have been brave and honest and had the whole thing out with him; the whole of my suspicions might have been unworthy. But I do not possess that quality which some may call courage and others interference—the quality that prompts a person to make trouble between husband and wife. Honesty and truth can be very dangerous weapons, unless they are skillfully handled—as every doctor learns.

And Margaret puzzled me. How much, if anything, did she know? Once or twice I thought I caught her eyeing her husband quizzically and enigmatically, but I may have been mistaken. When one has uneasy thoughts, one is sometimes apt to see more than is there. She might, of course, be one of those wives who take for granted that their husbands will seek other diversions when their own youth is on the wane. If that was so, any intervention on my part would probably only stir up muddy waters that had already been allowed to settle.

So I held my peace and took what the self-righteous would probably call the coward's path: I avoided them as much as I could without making it too noticeable, and I held my

tongue. Little by little, the business slipped into the background of my mind as something of no particular or immediate significance to me.

But I did not lose touch with them altogether. I still called on them occasionally, and after Isaac had had the telephone installed, Margaret would often ring me up and gossip. Her talk, whether over the telephone or at home, was nearly always about her family—what a good housewife Else was and what a pity it was she did not go about a bit more and find herself a husband. And she was particularly proud of Werner, who was proving a big success in his position as travelling representative.

That was early in 1936. As the year progressed, further news of him was given to me. He had been to America on a flying visit to New York and had sailed in the *Normandie*. Poor Margaret felt that that made him celebrated. And now he was on a long tour of Central Europe. He was going first to Prague, where Isaac's company had its principal Continental connexion, and from which town most of its supplies came. Then he was going down into the Balkans, probably as far as Greece, whence he would return to Poland and travel back to England by way of the Baltic States, Sweden, and Norway. He was, in fact, pursuing a great circle round his native Germany, which he was not allowed to visit.

These goings and comings gave him a very high importance in Margaret's eyes, but her greatest pride was in his gift of languages. He was one of those people who seem able to pick up at least a working knowledge of a tongue in a few weeks at the outside. He was, in fact, naturally polyglot, and no doubt this contributed considerably to his success as a representative, for I do not think he was interested, as his father was, in business as business. I believe he was more concerned with the opportunities it gave him to practise his languages. But whatever the reason, his marked success was already established, and he was furthering the interests of his company quite notably.

There was one other thing about this time that pleased Margaret especially: the British authorities had shown some slight signs of reconsidering their decision that he must not remain and work in the country. Isaac was already thinking of becoming naturalized, and this may have had something to do with it. No difficulties were placed in Werner's path when he wanted to come back at the end of trips both to report to his office and to see his family, and a broad hint was dropped that, if he cared to apply again in six months' time, he might be given permission to take a resident appointment in England.

Everything looked rosy again to Margaret. Her husband had re-established himself, and if their scale of living was not what it had been, at any rate they were comfortable and had no reason to worry about money. Little things about the flat told me that either Isaac's income was growing or else he was allowing a higher proportion of it to come into the home—the latter alternative being prompted by this still not-quite-dead suspicion of mine. Else was relieving her mother of the major part of the domestic duties. Werner was doing extremely well. The storm centre seemed to have passed. The sun might not be quite so warm as it had been before the clouds covered it, but at any rate it was better than the clouds themselves.

The news about Werner came with the regularity of official bulletins. He had been to Prague and gone on to Belgrade. Now he was in Sofia. The following week he was in Athens. He had visited Istanbul and gone on to the oil country in Rumania, and would call in at Bucharest before pushing on into Poland. I must confess that the lavishness of the details of this odyssey rather bored me at times. I had the unhappiest memories of some portions of his itinerary, and that may, perhaps, have biased me.

So at last he was reported at Warsaw, where he had seen this person and that. And then came the news that he was ill. He wrote himself quite cheerfully, and even Margaret,

ever ready to see tragedy before it happened—though it occurred in reality all too often in her life—was not unduly worried.

There was a gap in the correspondence. Margaret grew alarmed. At her urgent request, Isaac cabled to his business friends in Warsaw and had inquiries made. After a day's delay the report came through that he was in hospital, but that there was no need for alarm. Margaret seemed a little relieved at this news, though she was still in a very anxious frame of mind.

But the very next day, another cablegram arrived. My first knowledge of it was given by Isaac on the telephone.

"Listen, George," he said, and I could hear the agitation in his voice, "Werner is seriously ill in Warsaw. Can I come round to see you at once?"

"Yes, I expect I can see you for five minutes or so," I replied. Possibly that sounded indifferent or off-hand, but it was, in fact, a very busy morning for me.

And when Isaac arrived, he might well have been a patient himself. His face was colourless, his mouth drawn, his eyes haggard. As he shook hands with me, I could feel that he was trembling.

"What is the matter, Isaac?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I wish I knew precisely," he answered. "All I know is that I have had a cable from the friend who was acting as Werner's host in Warsaw. It says simply that Werner is seriously ill with some internal trouble, and that an immediate operation is being performed."

"He is in hospital?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Then I should imagine that whatever can be done is being done."

"George, please listen to me. Margaret is distracted at this. She is almost in a panic—you know how she gets—and I'm not sure that I'm very much better. You see, he is

our only son, and so brilliant a boy. For our sakes—for his sake—will you go out there, George?"

I raised my eyebrows. "But really, Isaac!" I exclaimed. "What possible good would it do? There are good surgeons in Warsaw. Their hospitals are good. By the time I get there, the operation will be over, and I expect you'll find that everything is all right. What could I do?"

"We trust you, George. We know nothing of these Poles—we do not even know the name of the surgeon who is operating. Even if—if you arrived too late, you could at least assure us that everything possible had been done. Do not turn this down hurriedly, please. I know you are a busy man, but this is urgent. It is the appeal of an old friend—of two old friends on behalf of their only son."

He was so pitifully pleading that I did not know what to say. A flat refusal would have driven him out of his wits. Yet the proposal was utterly ridiculous. I had been merely trying to evade the issue when I had asked what good my visit would do.

He leant forward earnestly.

"I know it is a very big thing to ask, George. But I do ask it. I can understand your hesitancy. You have your practice to consider. Name your own fee, George. I will pay it. I am not now a rich man, but I will find the money somehow, even if I have to sell all I have. I will pay for your fare by aeroplane. You see, that is how important it is to us—to Margaret and me. Please, George, please."

He was winning me round to his point of view. Despite all my rational arguments, I felt myself almost ready to agree with him. It was not his offer that altered my opinion; indeed, my opinion that the thing was a wild-goose chase remained unchanged. Rather was it the appeal of a human being in very acute distress.

"I'll tell you what I can do," I said slowly, almost as though I was saying something against my will—it was certainly against my better judgment—"I cannot go today.

I have a very urgent operation this afternoon, and I have some late appointments this evening, not one of which I can cancel. But if you have no news tomorrow I will go. On one condition only, though."

"Yes?" He spoke eagerly.

"That there is no talk of fees between us over it. If I go, I go because a friend has appealed to me for help. That is all. But," I added hopefully, "I do not suppose I shall have to go. Tomorrow—perhaps today even—you will have a telegram telling you that the operation has been successful and all is well."

He grasped both my hands. "Thank you, George, thank you—thank you a thousand times. You are so good. I knew you would not fail us. It will be such a relief to poor Margaret—and to me, also. We shall never be able to repay you for this on top of all your other kindnesses to us. God has blessed us by giving us a friend so good as you . . ."

He babbled on. I rose firmly and prepared to see him out. I had an appointment already considerably overdue. All the way to the door, he was pouring out thanks and gratitude.

When he had gone, I mopped my brow. It had been a little overpowering; and as I turned to go back to my room I caught the receptionist's eye. It had in it an expression of half amusement and half astonishment.

That evening when I thought it over, I felt I had made a fool of myself. My first reaction had been right: the whole thing was ridiculous. I was half inclined to telephone Isaac and withdraw my stupid offer. What possible good could it do in any circumstances? I asked myself for perhaps the fiftieth time. But then the vision of poor, broken Isaac came back to me—Isaac babbling forth torrents of thanks that sprang from the welling fountain of his heart. No, it was impossible to go back on my word. Even so, I did not look forward to the prospect. By that time the next day I might be flying across Europe—I might even be in Warsaw itself.

I was busy on a manuscript at that time and I managed,

in my interest in the work, to dismiss Isaac, Margaret, and all their troubles, from my mind. When I went to bed I was thinking entirely of what I had written and what must come next. In the morning I awoke with an uneasy feeling that this was the day when something unpleasant was due to happen. A sense of fate hung over me. I could not remember what it was until quite a little while later; and then it came to me that it was the trip to Warsaw. The morning would seal my fate.

It was earlier than usual when I reached my consulting-room, but there was no news there. I had half expected to find Isaac waiting for me, perhaps with the airline tickets already in his pocket. My second patient had gone before the telephone bell rang and I heard Isaac's voice. The tone told me all. I knew what he had to say before he used the words.

"He is dead," he said dully.

I spoke what words of sympathy I could. I doubt if he heeded them. The blow was so heavy that it had numbed him, taken the edge even off his sense of hearing. He was silent for so long that I thought he must have rung off. Then his voice came through again, dull and muffled as before.

"There is no need now for you to go," he said. "I will go myself. Perhaps you could come and see Margaret. She is very ill."

I promised I would that afternoon, and then I heard the click as he hung up. I felt depressed and saddened. Surely these people had had blows enough? Did Fate always have to choose the same persons over and over again as the targets of the shafts she desired to loose? It seemed incredible that so much tragedy could be packed in so short a while into the lives of a single small family, and I grimly asked myself how many times it was being repeated in other families, beknown only to themselves and their small circles of acquaintances.

Isaac had not overstated the case when he said Margaret was ill. She was suffering from the most extreme form of

psychic shock, and for the past few days had not helped herself by refusing to eat. Her physical condition was very low, and at one time I almost despaired of her, for she seemed to have lost that essential will to live, which, in the last analysis, means more to a patient than all the treatments in the world. The most difficult task a doctor ever has is, not to prescribe appropriate treatment, whether it be an operation or the correct drugs and diet, but to restore confidence in life and belief in living to a patient who has lost it. Perhaps it is here that the psychologists have their greatest victory to win when they have tired of waging battles among themselves over which of them is the sole repository of truth.

It was no good seeking for information from Margaret. She was just existing in a black world in which all sensation was absent except that of loss and disaster. I think she would have been prepared to die then and there if it had not been possible to point out her still remaining obligations to Isaac and Else. To her, the blow was doubly hard in that Werner had not only died, but died in a place so remote that she had not been able to be with him during his last hours.

The case was, in fact, a mystery. Werner had seemed to me a strong healthy young man, and there had been no hint that he had succumbed to any infectious disease. A letter which arrived after Isaac had left for Warsaw, told how he had been operated upon twice. There was again no indication of what the trouble had been, and the mystery deepened.

It was clear that I should get no definite account until Isaac returned, and speculation was useless. Moreover, the Jacobis were taking up a great deal of my time, for Margaret needed constant attention, and I called at least once a day. Else, too, was suffering from shock to a certain extent. My hands were full, and worrying and wondering would help no one.

Isaac did not return till nearly a fortnight later and his letters were uninformative. He gave a sketchy account of his

journey, his reception in Warsaw, and the funeral. Margaret had wished the body to be brought back to England after embalming, but that would have involved a great deal of trouble at both ends, and she was dissuaded from pressing the idea, though she gave in reluctantly. Then Isaac wrote that he was on his way home. He could not travel by the most direct route, of course, as that lay through Germany; and he knew now that the Nazis did not forget.

When at last he did arrive home, he seemed disinclined to talk about his experiences. He was a man with a load on his mind. Once or twice when I was alone with him, after examining Margaret, he seemed to be on the point of saying something, but each time he checked himself. And he began to indulge rather too freely in drink. I never saw him in the evening during those days after his return unless he had a glass of whisky by his elbow.

The latter worried me. It was bad enough to have Margaret going to pieces. I did not want Isaac to collapse as well. One evening, therefore, I mentioned it.

"Don't you think you're drinking a bit too much?" I said. After all he looked on me as his doctor as well as his friend.

He nodded. "Yes," he said quite frankly. "I know I am. But it helps to keep my thoughts dead. I don't want to think."

"It only gives a temporary relief," I replied. "I'm no enemy of drink in its proper place and in reason, but you're already beginning to show signs of wear, Isaac. Quite frankly, I believe that any man on his own has the inalienable right to choose his own path to the devil, and it's no concern of anyone else. But if he's got dependants, then he ought to think twice. Remember Margaret and Else, Isaac. They need you more than ever now that Werner's gone. Margaret is still a long way from being quite well again, you know."

Again he nodded. "Yes, you're right."

He had become suddenly thoughtful, and I wondered if my stratagem had been successful. My mention of Werner

had been deliberate. To me it seemed that what Isaac needed most was to confide in someone. He was trying by the questionable means of drink to drive inside himself something that would be better thrust out and shared. I hoped that my ruse might induce him to speak.

He was silent and brooding for so long that I thought I had failed. Then, very slowly, he looked up but avoided my eyes.

"It was horrible," he said dully, in just that voice in which he had told me of Werner's death. "I believe that if only I could have got you there in time, Werner would almost certainly be alive today."

Again he fell silent. I did not press him, for I thought that might lead him back into reticence. But at all events he had made a start, and that was a gain. With patience he might tell me everything.

That was how it turned out. He did not say much more that night, but next evening—I was still making a daily call on Margaret—he told me a little bit more. So it went on, until, piece by piece, the whole story came out. I could understand his despair, which alternated with a kind of dull indignation that was rather terrible, because he was so conscious of his helplessness to do anything.

It was the sort of story that would wring the heart of a stranger. To me, as a near friend of those concerned, it was torturing. To him, the father of the young man, it must have been unendurable anguish. For it seemed that Werner had died through negligence—or, at the best, laxity resulting from political intolerance had been a contributory cause.

When Werner had arrived in Warsaw he had been in excellent spirits. Isaac's friend, Leo Poljanski, had been delighted to see Werner so happy and contented. He was full of his experiences and the successes he had scored, not only in business but also in mastering a couple of new languages.

The whole world was at his feet, he thought, and he had outlined, with an almost boyish enthusiasm, a number of plans he had formed for the future.

The very next day, Werner fell ill with acute pains in the abdominal region. At first he made light of them, but later he agreed to see Polyanski's doctor, a young Jew with a rising reputation. The doctor had no doubts. Werner had appendicitis and must be operated upon without delay. He made arrangements for Werner to be taken to the nearest hospital.

It is precisely here that the tragedy began. Before I go into details, let me repeat what I have said before: I am no political propagandist with an axe to grind. So far as facts go I am merely a reporter, and it is of facts I must speak. Germany was not the only country in Europe that discriminated against Jews or where prejudice against the race existed. To some extent this discrimination existed in Poland, perhaps as a legacy of the days when Russian Poland was made by the Tsars a repository for the Jews they barred from their empire. This is the state of affairs that must be realized if the case of Werner Jacobi is to be fully understood.

There was no difficulty in arranging for Werner to go to the hospital. He was not a pauper and could pay for an ambulance and, in fact, for any attention that he might need. It was at the hospital itself that things started to go wrong. At that time the hospital was overcrowded and the staff was very busy, with more work than it could cope with. Warsaw was experiencing one of those periodical epidemics to which eastern Europe is always prone. The director of the hospital was a man of somewhat strong views, one of his most tenaciously and aggressively held ones being that of anti-semitism. In the then existing circumstances, he had made a rule that, as the staff could not handle all the cases coming in with as much speed as could be desired, priority was to be given to those who were not Jews.

Thus it was that the urgency of Werner's condition was not properly recognized. He was not, as the doctor had recommended, operated upon at once. On the contrary, he was relegated to a small, but overcrowded, ward and practically neglected.

Medically, what followed was almost inevitable. When, after seven days in his condition, he was at last brought to the operating theatre, it was not simply acute appendicitis from which he was suffering. The inflammation had spread dangerously and critically, and he was already an advanced peritonitis case.

The surgeons, once made fully aware of what they had to deal with, spared no effort. Werner was operated upon twice—the second operation being performed by Professor Wilenski, an abdominal specialist with an international reputation. But it was too late. No human skill could make up for the gross neglect to which Werner had been subjected when he was already in a critical condition. Within four days he was dead.

It was a grim and bitter tragedy. With that everyone must agree. But I could not see it entirely in the way in which Isaac presented it to me. Not unnaturally, he could not see that any excuses could be offered for the way in which Werner had been treated. As a general principle, this is incontestable. There had been gross, perhaps criminal, negligence. As a unit, the hospital had committed the greatest sin of which any medical man or institution can be guilty: it had thrown away a life that almost certainly could have been saved. And the hospital, therefore, as a corporate body has to take the blame.

But it is important to see that it was due to an administrative act, prompted by biased political theories, which was the root cause. So far as I can discover—and I was so interested that I subsequently caused some inquiries to be made—the medical staff did everything possible once the gravity of the case became known to them. They called in

their finest available abdominal surgeon, and the treatment given left nothing to be desired. Putting aside my concern in the matter as a personal friend, the lesson of this affair seems to me to throw into the brightest light the evils of political and semi-political interference into the affairs of medicine. The doctor, as a doctor, has nothing to do with politics. His one and only aim is to alleviate suffering and to save life when he can wherever it may be endangered. And this is demonstrated nowhere more clearly than in the field where political divisions and partisan feelings are at their most intense: the field of battle, for there, the military medical services treat all alike, not stopping to inquire whether the patient on the table or in the bed is friend or enemy. He is a case—a life to be saved or restored as far as may be to normal function; and that is all that matters.

Yet one cannot blame Jacobi for the attitude he took. All he could see was that his son, his precious only son, had been taken to a hospital, and that hospital had failed in its duty. Why it had done so, the deeper issues involved, were not his concern. Fate had struck at him, at Margaret, a new and even more terrible blow, for this was one which took away something that could never be recovered. He was a man who, suffering, had been made to suffer anew and saw his family share in that new trial. Such a man cannot take an objective view of his own case. He can but grow embittered and biased. It is thus, I suppose, that tragedy begets tragedy, multiplying itself like an evil growth, till it engulfs all on whom it throws its shadow.

## CHAPTER XII

### UNEASY TWILIGHT

GRIEF and bereavement affect each one of us in a different way. It is largely the result of our psychological make-up and the attitude we have adopted to life and living. There are some who find in a tragedy—personal loss or disaster—the spur to fresh endeavour; very often they emerge from themselves and seek to assuage their sorrow by care for the needs of others. There are others—the artists and creators—to whom grief acts as an irresistible urge to produce something that is supercharged beyond their normal work. There are those in whom it produces a quiet, almost terrifying, resignation; others who seem compelled to exhibit their sorrow in the most ostentatious form. And there are some whom these burdens of life throw inwards on themselves, causing them to shun company and to cling ever more closely to their own narrow circle.

The Jacobis belonged to the last-named class. With the death of Werner, their little family of three grew more and more into a closed circle. I had to call there fairly frequently again in order to keep a friendly eye on Margaret, for I was privately rather anxious about her condition. This latest blow had seriously affected her mentally and emotionally, and I was fearful lest Fate, striking again, should unbalance her. Even something quite trivial, I felt, might break the last frail thread that held her to the world of sanity. It was not surprising. All her life she had borne intolerable burdens, except for that one brief interlude of her early married life, and the strain was beginning to tell.

It was when the paralysing effects of the first shock began to disperse that the Jacobis' reaction started to show itself.

I was conscious of a distinct change in the atmosphere of their home. At first, it was almost indefinable, but later it took a more definite shape. It was almost as though they were drawing together for mutual protection against an unknown danger they all feared, like sheep huddling together during a thunderstorm. They still made me welcome in their house, but there was something different about it. It would be ungrateful and ungracious to suggest they were actually suspicious of me, yet the impression I gained was that they had lost trust in everything and looked upon everyone, even their friends, as potential emissaries of tragedy.

So it was that while they remained outwardly friendly towards me, I automatically made my visits more and more professional, less frequent, and each one briefer than the one before. For the first time, I felt an intruder in the house. It was an unfamiliar and somewhat disturbing feeling, for right from my very first visit in Hanover they had treated me as a valued friend and I had lapsed easily and naturally into the role of family confidant.

Just as soon as Margaret was well enough and I had satisfied myself that she was in no real danger mentally owing to the recovery of more normal powers of resistance, I ceased altogether to call there. Once or twice I telephoned to make quite sure that all was going well, at any rate from my own medical standpoint, and on each occasion I was told I must call. But neither day nor time was mentioned; the invitations were of that indefinite type which are rarely intended to materialize into actual visits. It had appeared to me before that the Jacobis had gradually been drifting away from me; now a definite barrier had been erected.

So it was that I heard little of the Jacobis during the next month or so. Occasionally odd items of news reached me through various channels, but I did not see them; and it was Margaret's voice on the telephone again that called me back

into their circle. And, once again, it seemed that Fate had struck another blow.

"Oh, I'm so glad I've found you in," she said when her call was put through to me. "I feared you might be out."

The words, the tone, the breathless manner—all suggested to me that there was trouble afoot.

"What is it, Margaret?" I asked anxiously.

"Else," she gasped in reply. "Else is very ill—in the greatest pain."

"Has a doctor seen her?"

"No," she answered. "I wouldn't let anyone see her till I had spoken to you."

I felt a little put out by what was intended to be a compliment. They were living in Ealing now, which is some way out, after all; and knowing Margaret, the pain Else had might be no more than an acute touch of colic. But, I persuaded myself, it is a duty to friends.

"All right," I said. "I will come as quickly as I can. But I can't promise to come at once. I have still several patients to see."

She impressed upon me how urgent it all was, but I told her not to worry, and if Else got seriously worse before I arrived she was to summon a local doctor. There I left it and returned to the work in hand, which was serious enough in all conscience, for in five minutes I had to see a patient and tell him that, in my opinion, his case was hopeless—a task I hate with all my soul.

It was early evening when, at last, my consultations over, I arrived at Ealing. Margaret had not overstated the case when she had said Else was in extreme pain and very ill. The picture she presented was quite typical and I was practically certain what it was before I began my examination she was suffering from acute appendicitis and an immediate operation was imperative.

As I emerged from Else's room, both Margaret and Isaac

were waiting for me. They saw my grave face and uttered cries of alarm, but I held up my hand.

"Come downstairs and let me talk to you," I said firmly. "There's no good in disturbing Else by noise outside her door."

They kept exchanging glances as we descended the stairs. When we were in the small dining-room, which was comfortably furnished and very cosy with its flickering log fire, I told them my diagnosis. I had expected anxiety and consternation. That would have applied to the relatives of any patient in such circumstances. But I certainly did not expect violent opposition.

"It is impossible, George," said Margaret, in the greatest agitation. "You cannot operate upon her. We cannot allow it."

I opened my eyes in surprise. "Margaret, you don't know what you're saying. There is nothing else to do, and if I operate at once there will be very little danger—practically none at all. Certainly not so much as if she is left as she is."

"No, no, no!" Margaret almost screamed. "I have lost one child through operations, and I can't run the risk of losing also my only remaining one."

"You can get other advice if you wish," I said, rather gruffly. "I have given you my honest opinion. Else must be operated on as soon as possible."

"I don't believe in operations," she moaned. "Poor Werner! If . . ."

Isaac slid his arm round her shoulders. "Come, Margaret," he said softly. "You're not being very kind to George—or very complimentary to his skill, are you, dear? What happened to Werner was because he was not operated upon in time—not because of the operations. Do you think George would risk Else's life needlessly? Hasn't he always been a good friend to us? Didn't we believe that if we could have got him to Warsaw in time, he would have saved Werner? Come, darling—you're overwrought. Be guided

by George's advice. He's come a long way to give it, you know."

She stared at me dumbly, her eyes red with tears. I feared a further outbreak of her old nervous trouble, but she seemed to have herself fairly well under control, apart from this ridiculous phobia over operations—though perhaps, in view of her experience, it was not so very ridiculous in a highly sensitive woman who had suffered as much as she had.

We waited for her answer. I was anxious—I have to confess it—to get away, but I was even more anxious to get her permission to operate on Else. If the intervention were delayed much longer, complications might set in. No doubt it was Margaret's not unnatural suspicion of doctors that had caused her for so long to postpone sending for advice.

I learnt afterwards that that was exactly what had happened. She had utterly refused to let Isaac call in the general practitioner who lived less than a quarter of a mile away; and she only consented at last to sending for me. Even now, she did not seem at all ready to take my advice. She was silent for so long that I thought of pressing my arguments and perhaps forcing her to agree. A frank statement of the dangers might be too much of a shock to her, however, in the light of her history, but I would not have hesitated if the need had arisen. A life—a young life—was at stake.

Slowly she spoke. "No," she said, "I can't bear the thought of her being operated upon. Is there no other way, George—no other way?" Her words dragged out miserably.

"In this case—no," I replied firmly, but not sharply. "Sometimes it is possible to disperse the trouble, but here an immediate operation is necessary."

"You are sure?"

Isaac looked at her quickly. "Margaret, is that quite fair to George? Really . . ."

I silenced him with a gesture. This was not the time for social politenesses.

"I am here as friend, I know," I said quickly, "but, first and foremost, I have come as a doctor to give advice. It is your right to be dissatisfied with my advice and you can call in a second opinion. But one thing is clear—Else cannot remain here. She must be got away to a nursing home or hospital at once." My mind was working quickly. I had decided on guile. "Listen. My car is outside, and I think I can take her in it without discomfort. It's large, you know. Let me take her to a home, and we can get another opinion in the morning if you think fit."

Isaac nodded. I do not know whether he saw through my plan at once, though his keen mind was quite capable of doing so, but at any rate he rallied at once to my support.

We got her down to the car, and I managed to persuade Margaret that she was too weak to come with us. I suggested that Isaac should, however, promise that she would not be left alone long. In any event neighbours were near, if she needed companionship, and the daily maid had not yet left and could remain if needed.

As soon as the car was on its way, I spoke in a low voice to Isaac.

"Of course, I've got to operate. The only thing to do is to get it over and present it to Margaret as an accomplished fact. There's no risk at all—but a terribly big one if it isn't done quickly."

Isaac nodded. "I hate the idea, but it's the only way," he agreed. "The very thought that Else must go onto the table depresses me and alarms me, after what happened to Werner. You do understand that, don't you, George?" he went on anxiously. "It's not lack of faith in you or doubt about your judgment—I trust you implicitly and would take your word before any other doctor's. No—it's that terrible feeling that the operating theatre is a sort of gateway to death for my children. But all the same, just because I do trust you so much, I'm willing and ready to take your advice, even though it means deceiving Margaret—a thing I hate to do." He

paused and stared straight ahead at the mascot on the radiator cap. "Yes, even in little things I've never deceived Margaret without feeling miserable about it sooner or later."

There was a curious intensity in his voice, but I put that down to his highly charged emotional state. He looked drawn and agitated, as well he might. But I was in no mood to analyse Isaac at that moment. My chief concern was with Else. I was glad he had fallen in, however reluctantly, with the course I had proposed. There was, of course, nothing irregular or improper about it, except in a purely private family sense. Else was of age and was quite competent to give consent to the operation on her own. Even if she had not been in a state to do so, her father's permission would have been adequate. This was one of those difficult situations in which the claims of two conflicting needs had to be reconciled, and so far as I could see what I had suggested was the only possible course.

After a short silence, Isaac began to talk again—a sort of soliloquy to which I listened with a faint impression of being an eavesdropper.

"Yes," he said, "it's a horrible business. I wonder how it will all end? Trouble—trouble—trouble—it seems to have been nothing but that for years. I have lost my business, my friends, my home, my son—and now my daughter is threatened." He suddenly dropped his introspective tone and turned slightly towards me. "George, I am not a practising Jew. I respect the religion and traditions of my race, but I take no active part in them. But things like this make one think, and I can't help wondering whether all this is not part of the curse that has settled on my people—whether I, as an individual, must wander homeless and hopeless, as my ancestors wandered in the wilderness and served in bondage to the Egyptians."

It hardly seemed to me a time for speculations of this kind, but he was so serious that I had to make some show of

interest. More than that, it would have been extremely unkind to have seemed to slight or upset him in those circumstances.

"That's not a question I can very well argue, Isaac," I replied. "It involves all sorts of things. I should say the greater part of your misfortunes are due to the craziness of the modern world, which is growing more and more topsy-turvy. As a Russian, I suppose I have a lurking belief in destiny—that's a legacy from the Asiatic blood in us, but I believe that in the long run destiny hardens and steels us and makes us better men and women. Good is ever growing out of evil."

It seemed to satisfy him, though it was far from profound. On the contrary, my answer was just a row of trite commonplaces of which I ought to have been thoroughly ashamed. Yet even they have their uses particularly in soothing anxious patients and their relatives.

By this time we had arrived at the hospital, and, having arranged for Else to be taken to a private ward and given some instructions to the house surgeon, I disposed of Isaac in a small waiting-room, where he could continue his speculations and meditations in quiet and solitude.

A more thorough examination fully confirmed the opinion I had formed of Else's condition. Immediate operation was imperative, and I gave the necessary orders for the theatre to be prepared. Having done so I returned to Isaac and reported what was afoot. I told him he had better go back to Margaret, and I would telephone at the earliest possible moment.

"Don't tell her what's happening," I warned him as he picked up his hat. "Else is detained for observation—that's all. We shall lose all if we rush things too much. Margaret must be faced with a successful operation—and she'll be so pleased she'll forget all her worries. You mark my words."

He nodded sombrely but made no reply. When I suggested he should take a taxi all the way home, he refused.

"I prefer to travel by train," he remarked. "It will give me time to think things over and prepare myself to face Margaret."

He looked so glum about it that he might have been going home to confess a crime.

"And I'll tell one of the nurses to ring Margaret that you're on your way—she'll know nothing about the case, so she won't be able to answer questions," I said, as he walked slowly and miserably down the front steps. I watched his figure, with the stooped head and hunched shoulders, disappear into the night, and suddenly I was filled with fear. No operation is foolproof, I reminded myself in alarm; there was always the ten thousand to one chance that even the simplest and safest-looking operation might terminate fatally through some unknown idiosyncrasy of the patient or some other obscure cause. The surgeon deals with life—life in all its forms from the protean cell to the complex human body; and because its very nature is unknown, life is always unpredictable. Suppose, I asked myself—suppose that this remote chance should operate in Else's case? I thought of Margaret and Isaac, and perhaps as a faint reflection of the latter's half-mystical talk I visualized the Jacobi family as a sure target for the arrows of Fate, against which it was useless to fight. I do not deny that for a few moments I was in a very unhappy state.

But I shook off the black mood. It was only a passing reaction from a somewhat trying evening. A surgeon must have nothing to do with bogeys of his own creation. He has quite enough real risks and problems to face without inventing imaginary ones. Confidence—but not overconfidence—must be his. Risks are there to be recognized and overcome, so far as human skill is able, and in this particular case there was no unusual risk. It was a commonplace operation that any competent surgeon would perform as a matter of course without a doubt ever crossing his mind.

So, in fact, it turned out. Up to the very moment of taking my place by the table, I confess I was haunted by some vague, indefinable fear at the back of my mind—some sort of prompting to throw in my hand and call on another surgeon to take the operation, but the instant the work began, all that disappeared. I was no longer concerned with Else or Margaret or Isaac. This was just another appendix case to which I was bound to give all the skill I possessed.

Actually, the operation was almost a model one. Else had great natural reserves of stamina and the very day following I was able to report to Isaac that not only had the operation been successful, but that the patient's condition was excellent and gave no cause whatever for anxiety.

I was not present when Isaac told Margaret the truth about Else, but he told me about it afterwards. She was thunderstruck at first, and seemed too dazed and shocked to make any comment. But when she had heard my report, she recovered, and the change that came over her after her first visit to Else—which she was able to make almost at once so swift was the girl's recovery—was remarkable.

Perhaps it was only my fancy, the product of an uneasy doubt that I had not quite played the game in deceiving her, but it seemed to me when I met her at the hospital that she was a little offhand. She did not say much beyond formal greetings, but when she came out from the ward she was smiling. It was the old smile I had not seen on her face since Werner died. She came towards me with hands outstretched.

"Thank you, George—thank you a thousand times," she said warmly. "I am sure you have saved Else's life—and that means more to us than you can ever understand. And I want to apologize for my rudeness and doubts last night, though I do venture to think you'll forgive me for them."

"Of course," I replied. "There is really nothing to forgive. You were naturally overwrought and in the circumstances your fears were quite explicable. I'm so glad you're not cross with me."

"Cross with you?" She pretended not to understand, but I am sure her eyes danced.

"Yes," I nodded. "After all, I did deceive you and I even induced your husband to tell you white lies. He was rather cut up about it."

"Poor Isaac!" She smiled softly. "He's a good husband, George—you know that. And really he was as worried and as anxious as I was."

"I can believe that."

A little while later, when Else had built up her strength again, all three of them went away for a short holiday in South Devon. I saw them soon after their return and was very pleased to notice how much happier all three of them appeared to be. A load had been lifted from their shoulders. They no longer clung together like animals in a storm for protection against an unknown and malign fate. Now they felt that their luck had changed and they could face the future with confidence again. Once more they thanked me for what I had done. I could not help feeling that what was of greater significance than the operation—which really was an ordinary routine one—was the fact that I had restored something of their faith in life; for without faith the very word life loses most of its meaning.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ANOTHER TWIST

MY RELATIONS with the Jacobis seems to fall into three distinct phases. There was the first period in Germany when I met them and assumed so naturally the position of a personal friend. There was the meeting again in England, after their flight from the Reich—a second period that was never quite so intimate as the first, and that I always think of as terminating with the recovery of Else. And there was the third and final phase, the story of which I have yet to tell—a story that to me is the most interesting of all. And indeed, should not the third act of a drama be the most compelling and richest in incident?

I saw comparatively little of them after their return from their holiday. They resumed their normal life, and, from the little I was able to observe things went well for them. The little house at Ealing had something fresh in it almost every time I called there. On this occasion it was the new bureau that Isaac had bought for Margaret, to her great delight—it was just what she had always wanted. On another it was Else who showed me the new bracelet her father had bought her. Old commonplace things were replaced by others of better design and quality. They were beginning to find their feet again, settling down to an ordered pattern of life from which fear was gradually departing. They were also forming new friendships and associations, mainly among the growing band of refugees who flocked to Britain, until I began to feel rather a stranger in their midst, a survival from a past existence the memory of which was better blotted out. My visits grew less and less frequent.

All this was towards the end of 1937. It marked the end of the second phase I have mentioned. The third and final phase was ushered in in 1938—to be more precise in March of that year, which also marked significant events in world history. This was the year of Hitler rampant, the year that was to reach a climax with the Munich ‘agreement’, that last tragic theme in the overture to war.

This time the evil destiny that had dogged Margaret all her life struck with shattering force and decisiveness. She was utterly unprepared for it, like a sailing ship taken aback by a sudden squall with all sails set. For her life had found the quiet places again. But, unlike a squall, this blow did not pass as quickly as it came. Its effects, in fact, were cumulative, and each new discovery seemed blacker than its predecessor.

It started with Isaac’s sudden death. There was no lingering illness. He was well one day, going about his business, and even discussing with Margaret, during the evening, his plans for one of those trips to the provinces which once had roused my suspicions. The next day he was dead, a victim of angina pectoris. His personal secretary, a refugee German-Jew named Schultz, came himself to the house and broke the news to Margaret as tactfully and gently as he could.

But no tact or sympathy could disguise the magnitude of the disaster. Isaac was dead. The man who had rescued her from a life that had threatened a continuous slavery and raised her for a while to the pinnacle of ease and riches was gone. The centre of her world had collapsed. All her old nervous troubles surged up again from the depths into which I had hoped they had sunk for ever. Else sent for me at once, simply saying that her mother was in a state of collapse, but without telling me the cause.

The news, when I heard it, staggered me. It was something I had not expected to hear though on my rapid journey to Ealing I had speculated a good deal on the cause of this

fresh collapse on Margaret's part. This was, indeed, the hardest blow of all.

For some little time I almost despaired of Margaret's recovery. She had lost all desire to live and would make no effort either to pull herself together mentally or to rally physically. Else was magnificent. She handled all things with the greatest self-confidence, and though a casual acquaintance might have described her as hard and unfeeling, I knew very well that beneath that calm and often smiling face was a grief very keenly felt.

It was not only in household matters that she acted. Death, especially when it comes to the head of a household and a business man, brings a great deal of business in its train. There are papers to sign, oaths to swear, statements to be made, and though much can be done by a solicitor there are some items which only the principals can handle. It looked at first as though all this would be indefinitely held up, for Margaret was practically incapable of holding a pen to sign her name, and she could not be brought to realize the importance of making an effort to complete at least the preliminaries. But one day Else caught her in a more responsive and calmer mood, promptly called her solicitor, and persuaded her mother to execute a power of attorney in her favour. This cleared the way.

As time went on I noticed that Else began to look more and more worried. I assumed that the long strain of containing herself and looking after Margaret and the legal affairs was beginning to tell, yet something about her suggested that the trouble lay elsewhere. I did not long remain in ignorance.

One evening she took me into the small room that Isaac had used as his den. It was much as it used to be except for various little touches, such as the flowers, which indicated that now it was occupied by a woman. She settled me in a chair, gave me a cup of coffee, and stirred the fire to a brilliant blaze. For a moment or two she sat staring into the

flames as though deep in thought. Then she looked at me suddenly.

"George," she said slowly, "you have been a very, very good friend of ours. I don't know what we should have done without you. And I'm going to repay your friendship by asking you to help me once again."

"Why, of course," I returned. "Isn't it the greatest privilege of friends to help one another?"

"But you have helped so much and we have done so little. Besides—what I want to ask you isn't pleasant. I want you to listen to a tale of family woe, and that's horribly boring to an outsider."

"I am not an outsider," I retorted rather warmly. It struck me as a rather curious thing to say after her previous remarks. "And I am a good listener—if I make up my mind to it."

"No, I didn't mean it that way," she said quickly, seeing her mistake. "I meant it would be boring to anyone not immediately concerned. It's about father. I've got to tell someone, though I suppose it will all leak out some day and if you would listen . . ."

"Don't hesitate, Else," I said. "I know what it can mean to share something with a friend. It relieves the burden, even if the friend can do nothing practical about it."

"That's all it can be," she answered rather ruefully. "There's nothing that can be done about it."

She paused again and stared into the fire. Then abstractedly, as though considering how to begin, she lit a cigarette, which was a rare thing for her to do: she did not smoke much. When at last she did speak it was in a very level, businesslike voice. She had inherited something of her father's self-control.

"Of course," she began, "you know we lost practically everything when we left Germany. Daddy had just a little he managed to keep out of the Nazis' reach, which was what

he put into this business over here. It saved us, of course, as you know, and when he took charge of affairs, things began to look up. No one could say he wasn't a good business man."

"On the contrary, I think most people envied him his brains and drive," I said.

"Yes. But I suppose all that in Germany and then Werner on top of it upset him a little, though he never said much. He was not quite the same in England as he'd been in Germany, and I think he realized it himself. Besides, I always think there is something unstable in Jewish blood, don't you?"

"What exactly are you driving at, Else?" I asked, growing a little impatient of these hints.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said wearily, "but it's all so difficult. Anyway, you know I've been trying to get Daddy's affairs settled, don't you?"

I nodded.

"It hasn't been easy, though I had the help of a good lawyer. Everything was in a terrible mess. But bit by bit we've straightened things out—and it's a pretty beastly result. Oh, George, it would be bad enough if it was just—money. But it isn't."

"Oh, Else," I exclaimed, "please stop this beating about the bush. If you are going to tell me—tell me."

I was brusque, perhaps brutal in the face of her obvious distress. But I had not asked for this. I was not trying to find out the family secrets, but had been invited to listen; and here she was almost coming to the point again and again and then shying away from it.

She looked at me. Her expression was grim, and I could sense the conflict going on in her—a conflict between her self-control and a desire for flight. I was sorry then I had spoken so sharply.

"I'm coming to it, George. First of all, Daddy has left us quite penniless. There's nothing for us to live on at all, and

I shall certainly have to get a job. Perhaps Mother may have to as well."

I was staggered. It was beyond belief. Latterly Isaac had seemed to be doing so well, and he had, I knew, been always such a careful man, never spending to the limit of his income. He had, in fact, when we had been in Germany, once given me quite a lecture on what he had called my 'extravagance'.

"But—but," I said, unable to call to mind the right words, "but surely there is something—this house—the furniture—some investments?"

She shook her head and her grimness increased. "No. We thought we were fortunate in being able to rent this house when most people had to buy. As for the furniture—yes, there is that. But I doubt whether it will fetch enough to cover the arrears of the rent that have piled up since Daddy died."

I was still a little stunned. "You mean there is literally nothing?"

Slowly she nodded. "Nothing. And if it hadn't been for the generosity of Daddy's partners, there would be less than nothing. I mean, we should have had a pile of debts to face and no hope of ever clearing them."

"But all this is incredible, Else," I cried. "It's fantastic. Isaac was a good business man. What had happened? Had all this trouble on the Continent affected his business severely?"

Again she shook her head. "No, it wasn't that." I did not like the hard, vicious look in her eyes. "If it had been, it would have been easier to bear. No one can be held responsible for misfortunes that are thrust upon him. No," she said again, "it wasn't that. On the contrary, they tell me the business has steadily improved these past two years—and that was what Daddy himself had told us when he gave Mother money to get those little extras for the home. I could face that—but this . . ." She made a gesture of despair.

"Tell me, Else," I said quietly. "I think it will help you if you do." Already I was beginning to see the truth.

"It was Daddy's own doing," she replied wearily. "I told you he seemed to have gone mad or unbalanced or something. He—he had a woman, George. Unfortunately I've seen her—a horrible blonde slut." She almost spat the words.

I nodded. It was what I had been expecting. My thoughts had gone at once to that night in the restaurant.... So my suspicions then had been correct, except that it appeared to have gone further than I had thought.

"It's a horrible story," Else resumed in a tired, monotonous voice, her gaze fixed on the flickering fire. "I went with Mr. Adler, my solicitor, to the office, and we saw Mr. Gresley, the young Englishman they'd recently made a director. He and Daddy had practically run the business in the last couple of years or so. He'd promised to have the accounts and things ready for us. As a matter of fact, I'd gone as a matter of form and politeness. I don't understand these things; you know."

"He was looking very grave when we got down to business.

"'I'm afraid I've not very good news for you,' he said. 'The accountant and I have checked through everything very carefully, and I'm sorry to have to tell you that, so far from there being any assets, Mr. Jacobi is heavily in debt to the company.'"

She paused for a while, staring into the fire with an expression suggesting that the very memory of that interview was a nightmare to her.

"Of course, I was staggered," she resumed at last. "It was a terrible thing to hear, and poor Mr. Adler looked as though he'd been shot. Then he started asking questions, and I gathered that for some time Daddy had been drawing very heavily and taking out more money than he was really entitled to. I can't give you the proper details, because I don't understand them. But I do remember that Mr. Adler

asked Mr. Gresley about Daddy's capital holding, I think he called it.

"Mr. Gresley shook his head, and looked rather awkward. 'It was purely nominal in the first place,' he said. 'And in any event it does not cover his indebtedness to the company. The whole position is very complicated and difficult for all of us. I can hardly say how sorry I am for Mrs. Jacobi and Miss Jacobi here. But, of course, there is no question of our pressing any claim against whatever other estate there may be. It won't be easy for us, but we do recognize how much we owe to Mr. Jacobi's efforts here, and our proposal is that we take his capital holding, for what it's worth, in full settlement of money owing to us.'

"That was all he would say then, and Mr. Adler promised he would let Mr. Gresley know as soon as he could. Then we went away."

"That must have been a terrible shock for you," I said, taking her hand, which lay quite lifelessly on her knee.

Once more she gave that slow, tired nod.

"The rest of it came out later," she went on. "Mr. Adler checked up all the accounts and found nothing at all to question. On the contrary, wherever there was the slightest possible doubt, we had been given the benefit of it, and he told me that, if they had wished, the company could quite legally have almost doubled its claim. Of course, we couldn't do anything else but accept the company's very generous offer. In a way it was their tribute to Daddy for the work he had done."

"And there was nothing else at all? Wasn't he insured?"

She twisted her mouth curiously. "There was one policy at one time for five thousand pounds, but he had used it as security for a loan, so that's gone as well."

"It's incredible," I said. "Incredible." And indeed it was to me. I could not imagine how any man of Isaac's temperament could have gone so completely insane. His affection for his family and his care for them had always

been the point I had liked best in his character; and now it seemed that he had recklessly thrown everything away with no thought for the future. It was not as though he were a young man struck down by an accident; he was middle aged and must have had some inklings at least that he was suffering from a dangerous disease.

"Yes. Remembering Daddy as he used to be in Germany, it really is beyond belief. The details make me feel sick. I was telling you about them." Else moistened her lips and braced herself a little, as though for an unpleasant ordeal. "After we'd accepted, I had a little later to go to the office to sign some papers. Mr. Gresley was charming, but it was clear he was as much at sea as I was over the whole affair. I happened to remark—I don't know why—that I could not understand where all the money he had drawn had gone, and Mr. Gresley stared at me. The accounts were open, and a draw of five hundred pounds last summer caught my eye. 'The sums are so big,' I said. 'I wonder what that was for?'

"Mr. Gresley stared at me again. He looked genuinely surprised. 'It's funny you should mention that one,' he said, 'because Mr. Jacobi did happen to mention why he needed the amount. It was for that trip to France you all had then.'

"It was my turn to be surprised," she continued bitterly. "We had not been to France, then or at any other time. We had had no holiday at all for nearly two years until that trip after my operation. I told Mr. Gresley so, and he shot me a quick glance and turned the subject. But the incident stuck in my mind, and I began to wonder what had been happening. It had been a mystery all along, and this made it all the deeper. I told Mr. Adler so and made him promise to find out all he could."

She sighed and remained silent for a few moments.

"I suppose you can guess what it was. He had picked up with this woman somewhere and she was bleeding him white. That's a common enough story, of course, but it still astonishes me that Daddy should have succumbed to that sort of

thing. I suppose all his misfortunes did unbalance him in some way. At first, I felt too shocked even to believe it, and then I was filled with a terrible desire to find out every one of the horrid details. I pressed poor Mr. Adler and worried Mr. Gresley till I believe they thought I was going mad."

Else shuddered slightly as though a cold draught had caught her, but the room was overwarm.

"Bit by bit we pieced it together. It had been going on for years," she said wearily. "He seems to have met her soon after we came to England and she quite took possession of him. Most of those trips he said were business ones he spent with her, of course. At first it was only occasional meetings, but then he took a flat for her somewhere round Victoria way—and that was when Daddy started to draw out too much from the business."

Once more she paused. The story was growing increasingly painful to her. The words were beginning to drag out.

"It's a familiar sort of story, I suppose," she went on. "You can fill in the details for yourself, but when it actually happens to you, it seems utterly incredible. You can't realize that anyone could be so filthy—yes, I say that of my own father. Things went from bad to worse, and he bought her a small house somewhere out Barnet way, I think. That was when the insurance policy was taken as security. And then he transferred some stocks and shares he held to her, making them an absolute gift, as Mr. Adler called it. He must have been mad."

I did not know what to say. As she told the story in its general outline, it was not unfamiliar; it was the old one of the expert adventuress finding a good mine to work—and working it with skill. And Else was right when she said that the story, however familiar it might be in experience, had an air of utter unreality when it came home to one personally. I thought of Isaac as he had been in Germany: the devoted husband and father. I thought of him as he had

been in this country, seemingly no less devoted and concerned with his family's welfare. But for that chance encounter with him in the restaurant, I do not suppose I would ever have even suspected the slightest difference in his attitude. Indeed, it had been so slight that I had reached the conclusion I was letting my imagination run away with me.

"It's terrible," I said at last, feeling that the silence should be broken. It had a frightening quality about it that frayed the nerves.

"That is not the worst of it," she said, her gaze still on the fire. "It was bad enough just to find these things out. But then, on top of it all, I—I saw her."

"How on earth . . . ?" I exclaimed.

"No, don't interrupt. Let me tell it my own way, or I shall never get it out at all," she remonstrated. "I was with Mr. Adler one afternoon and his clerk came in to say Mrs. Beecher wanted to see him. He asked who she was and what she wanted, and the clerk said all she would say was that it was about Mr. Jacobi. We looked at each other—the same thought flashed in both our minds. Mr. Adler hesitated, then went outside, saying he'd see her in the small waiting-room. I don't know why—it was almost as though I were pushed to do it—but I followed him to the door of his room and looked out. There she was, standing at the clerk's reception desk, a horrible brassy, blonde creature. If she'd been even attractive, perhaps it might have been easier to bear, but to compare her with Mother . . . "

She gritted her teeth.

"Mr. Adler told me she'd called first at the company and then been referred to him. And she had had the impertinence to want to know why she hadn't been informed of Daddy's death and hadn't been invited to the funeral. But most of all she wanted to know about the will. What Mr. Adler told her annoyed her and she didn't believe him, but apparently he reminded her that if she'd taken everything

he'd had during his lifetime, she couldn't expect anything to be left to her. And that's exactly what's happened," she concluded, bitterly. "She's had everything that should be ours."

Suddenly her anger blazed up and she turned a flaming face towards me.

"It isn't justice, George! There's this woman with a house of her own and an assured income, all taken from Father's work, and we—his wife and his daughter—have nothing at all except debts. Yet nothing can be done about it. That's the English law, Mr. Adler tells me. Provided a husband keeps his wife and children from becoming a burden on the rates, he can do what he likes with his own property. If he'd left her everything in his will, that might have been challenged in the Courts, but I expect she knew all about that and got all she could while Daddy was alive. She'd know all the tricks of the trade. That's what makes it so utterly crushing," she went on passionately. "If Daddy had failed in business, well, we could have accepted the position better. It wouldn't have hurt so much. But he hadn't. He'd encouraged us to believe things were improving all round, and that actually is what was happening, according to Mr. Gresley. All the benefits were going to her, and I suppose all those gifts to Mother and me were either a sop to his conscience or else something to cover his tracks if anyone mentioned his drawings. Oh, I never even dreamt I should speak of Daddy like that, George. But I've got to face the facts. It's no good casting round for excuses that don't deceive anyone, least of all oneself."

She rose slowly to her feet.

"That's the outline of it, George. There are other things I could tell you, but that's enough."

"It's bad enough, too," I replied. I was still feeling too dazed to make any useful suggestion or comment. It seemed impossible for anything to be done. The solicitor said it was hopeless. Isaac's colleagues had softened the blow

as much as they could. I did not know, of course, what sums were involved, but I gathered they were not inconsiderable. Else had spoken of this woman's having a house and an assured income. The whole situation was like a nightmare come true.

I comforted Else as much as I could and then, seeing that she had control of herself, asked her how much Margaret knew of these things.

"Nothing," she answered, shaking her head. "I dare not tell her in her present state. She has asked once or twice about money, but I've told her not to worry."

"What do you intend to do?" I asked.

"I don't know." She shrugged helplessly. "There is just enough to last for a little while longer. I hope that by then Mother will be better and we can thrash things out. What are the chances do you think?"

I shook my head. Margaret's recovery to normal depended almost entirely on herself. If she could get a grip on herself, all would be well. But until she did, advice was practically useless. There are depths that modern medicine, with all its resources, cannot sound: the depths of the human psyche, where strange forces are hidden. They still lie out of reach, for the psychologists, for all their claims, have no more than a lead-line, and a deep-sea sounder is required.

"Physically, she is perfectly satisfactory now," I said. "All we can do is to revive her hope and interest in life by sympathy. You are more likely to do that than I am, Else."

It was cold comfort, I know. But what else could I offer? Can the doctor commit any greater sin than to hold out false hopes, which are the picks that hack the way to tragedy?

## CHAPTER XIV

### LIFE BEGINS AGAIN

MARGARET's recovery was even more abrupt than I had expected. Day after day I called at the Ealing house to find her always in exactly the same condition. Physically, she was a fit woman. Mentally, she was not far from death. She took no interest in anything, and it seemed that nothing could rouse her. Her food meant nothing to her. She ate it, sparingly, in response to the instinctive demands of her healthy body. It was that physical fitness which saved her. Without it, and its insistent demands, debility might have been added to mental lassitude, and then her case would have indeed been serious.

It was in this state of inertia, an active body immobilized by a dormant mind, that I left her one Tuesday evening. I did not stay long, for Else was not communicative, and there was nothing for which to stop. On the Wednesday I was unable to call, having been summoned to an operation some way out of town—a case of exceptional urgency. When I arrived on the Thursday, the door was opened by an Else wearing an unfamiliar bright smile.

"I'm glad you've come, George," she said. "It's happened just as you said it would. Mother's made a sudden recovery. Yesterday afternoon she suddenly got up and dressed herself, and said she was tired of lying there doing nothing. She's in the dining-room now. Of course, she's a bit weak and soon gets tired after all that time in bed, but she's quite alert again and she's begun pressing me for details of—well, the will and so on. Do you think I ought to tell her yet?"

"Wait until I've seen her," I said. "I must find out what her condition is first."

Else nodded and led me into the dining-room. Margaret was sitting by the fire. It was quite pleasant to see her looking more her normal self. There were naturally signs of weakness about her, for she had spent a long time in bed, but there was light in her eyes, and she smiled at me as I came in.

"Why, Margaret," I said, "you don't know how pleased I am to see you downstairs again."

She held out her hand to me. "You've been very patient and long-suffering, George, and I'm afraid I've been very perverse. No other doctor would have stood so much from a patient. I think it was your persistence that brought me to my senses again. You see, if you'd just gone away and told Else to carry on, I really would have come to the final conclusion that everything was hopeless. But you came almost every day and at last I said to myself: 'If I don't do something soon, I shall wear that poor man out or drive him quite crazy'—and so I pulled myself round and here I am."

Her manner was almost light-hearted.

"Now I'm here," I remarked, "I may as well justify myself." As I made a quick examination of her, taking her pulse and testing her reactions, I railed her. "I'm not sure you were telling the exact truth just now," I ran on. "It may be my persistence cured you, but what you thought was that you simply couldn't go on seeing that face staring at you so often, and you decided the only way to get rid of it was to make a sudden recovery."

She laughed. "No, really, George, it wasn't quite as bad as that," she said. "And I am truly grateful for all your care. It was practical sympathy, and that, to my mind, is the mark of true friendship."

"Margaret," I returned, with mock sternness, "if these broadsides of politeness go on, I shall crumple up under the strain."

She laughed again. To me, nothing was more welcome

than that unforced sound, which spoke of a mind that had, through its own efforts, regained its equilibrium. It was more convincing than any examination I could make.

"You know very well I'm not just being polite," she insisted. "I am very, very grateful to you, and that's one more debt to you I shall never be able to repay."

"You're repaying it in full by your complete recovery," I said with an air of finality. The word 'debts' had an ominous suggestion to me, for she would have to be told the truth about her affairs as soon as possible and I was anxious about the way she would take it. "But you mustn't overdo it. Take things easy to start with: early to bed; don't hurry up in the morning; and when it's fine get some fresh air. But I've seen so much of Else's competence that I'm sure she'll see to all that. I hope you've thanked her, too, for all she's done."

"Of course. You're both a couple of dears."

On the excuse that I did not want to overstrain her and that, as her medical adviser, I insisted she should go to bed, I did not stay long. We chatted for a little on purely general topics, and, so far as I remember, Isaac was not mentioned once during the evening. When I said good-bye, she smiled and thanked me all over again and looked more like the old Margaret than ever. There was something pathetic in it, something that made me curse inwardly at the irony of life. For here was she, rehabilitated after a crushing shock, with another, and perhaps even greater, one waiting for her.

In the hall, Else looked at me inquiringly. I knew what she wanted.

I nodded. "Yes," I said, "you can tell her. But don't rush it. Choose your moment, and above all don't fling it at her. Lead up to it. I expect she'll start asking about things again, and then give it to her in small doses, but whatever you do, don't give her the impression you're holding anything back from her. That'll make her worry and fret—and that might be disastrous."

"Do you think she'll have a relapse?" Else asked.

I shrugged my shoulders slightly. "It's impossible to say. One can never forecast how people will take things. Often their reaction is entirely unexpected. But if you do as I say, you'll lessen the shock as much as possible and so reduce the risks of another attack."

"I'll do my best," she said.

As I walked down the short path at the front of the house I reflected to myself that I was glad my part, so far, amounted to no more than giving good advice. What I had said was, no doubt, thoroughly sound and desirable, but whether it was practical I did not know. But I trusted Else. She had revealed unsuspected powers during these weeks of trial. Curiously at a time when her father had sunk to the nadir in her estimation, she had come most to resemble him in her grasp of situation and her courage and ability to face facts as they stood, without sentiment or regard for hampering conventions. She had, too, shown herself a natural nurse with just the right balance of sympathy and firmness. Else, who had hitherto been a rather negative personality to me, had risen very markedly in my esteem. She had all her father's strong points, polished by her own womanly qualities. For the first time in my life, I admired Else for having become—or perhaps just revealed that she was—a mature, balanced, and distinctive human personality.

For the next two or three days I was extremely busy, and I did not call on the Jacobis. Nevertheless, the thought of Margaret crossed my mind from time to time, and I wondered whether Else had yet told her anything of the truth. I imagined not. Rather grimly, I half expected that the first news I should have of that business would be an urgent call on the telephone to attend Margaret in yet another nervous collapse.

Actually it was a week later when I again visited the house. Else did not say anything when she answered the door, though I thought she gave me a rather curious glance,

the significance of which I could not grasp. She led me to the dining-room, where Margaret was sitting by the fire.

For a moment I stared—very rudely, I am afraid—in silence. A great change had come over her. It was not that she had lost all traces of her recent nervous instability, but rather that she had acquired a new and very positive look of firmness and determination. Her mouth was set, her eyes clear and as she took my hand I noticed a harder grip.

"How are you, Margaret?" I asked.

She smiled, rather more grimly than usual. "Physically, absolutely fit," she replied. "Mentally, I suppose the same. I'm a changed woman."

"Changed?" She had given the word a special emphasis that hinted at some special meaning.

She nodded. "Yes. I find myself in a different, but not wholly unfamiliar world. Else has told me, of course."

She made this announcement in such a matter of fact voice that I was again astonished. It seemed incredible that the revelations could have left her so calm and self-controlled. She appeared to read my thoughts.

"I suppose you're surprised at the way I've taken it," she went on. "Yet it's not so very surprising, is it? The first instinct is to act for the preservation of one's life, and a woman who's got to start earning her living again at my age can't afford nervous breakdowns and the other luxuries one can allow oneself when one has a rich husband." She spoke with a touch of grim humour.

"I'm very glad you've been able to see it like that," I said, rather lamely. I was surprised, yet it is not an unfamiliar phenomenon. Women have extraordinary powers of recovery, and one is unable to predict their reactions along purely physical lines. They may succumb to something which is, after all, only a triviality in life and yet rally with courage and determination in the face of a real crisis. How often, in fact, is it not the woman's steadfastness and grit

that bring a man through a situation he would probably have been unable to bear by himself?

"Facts have to be faced," she said resolutely. "They're unpleasant facts, but that doesn't make any difference—it rather makes it all the more necessary not to gloss them over, don't you think? They could hardly be more unpleasant, could they?" Her voice was even—almost detached—in its coolness.

"It must have been a great shock to you," I remarked.

"Yes—and no, George," she replied. She was full of surprises for me that evening. "You see, I'd suspected for a long time he'd been having an *affaire*, though I never knew for sure. She's a poor wife who doesn't recognize certain signs of it in her husband." And, again to my astonishment, she smiled. "But what did that matter? These things happen. He'd been a good husband to me and the children. He had suffered and lost a great deal. If he felt the need of a little relaxation and excitement—well, what of it? I'm getting old anyway. But I don't think it was that, George. I believe, to start with, it was just a sort of sudden urge to break away into something fresh."

"You are being very realistic, Margaret," I commented, wonderingly.

She shrugged. "What else can one be?" she returned. "Ideals like turning the other cheek and suffering meekly don't stand up to a knock-out punch on the jaw."

"So you had your suspicions," I murmured, more to myself than to her. There were pictures in my mind of the glances I had seen her give him at the time when I decided I had better keep away from the house, since I probably shared an unwholesome secret. Margaret was revealing new facts of a very complex character. I would never have suspected her of this almost cynical realism in the face of a blow like the one she had taken. Nor, I must confess, had I considered her penetrating or even worldly-wise enough to know her husband so shrewdly.

"All the same, George," she continued, "it is a blow. I never imagined he'd go so far as he did or get so infatuated with the creature. I gave him the credit for having more sense than that. If I had I would have put my oar in with a vengeance. You see, I didn't suspect his duplicity. I can understand a man having a brief *affaire* as an outlet for some sort of emotional crisis—that's what I thought Isaac's was. I can understand a man who really does fall in love with another woman to the extent of being honest about it and going off with her. But I can't understand how any man, especially Isaac, can turn over practically all he's got to some little chit I can hardly imagine he ever really loved and at the same time try to be the perfect husband and father here. Isaac had so much moral courage," she went on reflectively. "If he made up his mind he didn't care who knew it, however unpopular or even cruel his decision might be. That was what made him so successful in business—and so much hated, too, of course."

"The only explanation," I said, seeing that she was quite ready to discuss it rationally, "is that he came for a while entirely under her influence."

"Not very profound, George," she remarked. "And it's not easy to imagine, is it? Can you see Isaac just buckling up to someone else's influence? After all, he even kept the Nazis at bay for quite a time. He never did anything unless his mind was made up. But if he'd made up his mind he wanted this woman, why on earth didn't he tell me?"

I shook my head, and she made a gesture that suggested sweeping the whole subject away.

"It's no good talking about it," she resumed in a determined tone. "Our concern is with the future much more than the past."

"Have you any plans?" I asked.

"Not exactly plans," she replied, "but it's obvious some things have got to be done quickly. We must get rid of this place and move somewhere else as soon as we can. While

we're here we're just running up debts that we shall never be able to pay. That's the first step. And I must get a job of some kind to keep things going."

"You? What are you going to do?"

"Frankly, I don't know, George. I've hardly got as far as thinking of it. I must take whatever is offered me and be thankful that at my age I've got something—if I do."

"And Else?"

"I'm not going to see her pushed about from job to job, George. You know what happens these days to young women without any special qualifications. Else's going to train for beauty culture. There's a big future in that, you know, and she's rather gifted that way."

"But—you said you had to face facts, Margaret—can you afford it?"

She nodded. "Yes, I think so. Things aren't quite so bad as they appeared at first, George. I've got just a little money of my own put away, and I've a friend in the business who'll take Else as a pupil for quite a small premium, and I shall still have something left over to live on for a little while until I find a job. A job." She sighed, her first sign of being deeply affected by the whole business. "What *can* I do, George?"

"What qualifications have you?" I returned, more to hide my utter helplessness to make a suggestion than in search of information. She had none, so far as I knew.

"All the things that go to make up a housewife and hostess—that is to say skill at a hundred-and-one things which are commercially valueless. I can cook, sew, market, keep household accounts, and so on. I can play bridge, mix cocktails, and manage conversations so that my guests aren't too bored. And that's all. Yes, I know what you're thinking: a good housekeeper for someone. George, if I starve, I refuse to be anyone's housekeeper. I'd rather die."

She spoke with such intensity that I could not resist a smile, which she returned.

"No, I've had enough of that in my life. If at my age I'm to be dragged out of the rut, then I may as well make an entire change. Oh, I know I ought to take anything, placed as I am, but I'll try everything else first."

"I'm glad to see you've so much determination," I said.  
"You ought to get something with that outlook."

"I'll try."

"And if I hear of anything, I'll let you know," I said, rising to go. "I can see there's no need to tell you to keep your chin up—you're doing that automatically, and it's a treat to see it. I'll look in again soon and see how you're getting on—and don't forget to let me know what happens."

"No," she replied. "I'll report progress."

As I drove home, I marvelled again at the immense change in Margaret. She was now as completely in control of herself and her destiny as previously she had been ready to lose all interest in life. I had gone prepared to offer all sorts of help and advice, but beyond a vague promise, which anyone would have made in the circumstances, I had done neither. Help, I felt, would have been indignantly refused: she was determined to stand on her own feet and settle her score with the world on her own account. Nor did she need advice. Her mind was made up with a decision that would not have disgraced her husband at the height of his business success.

As it had been with Else, so it was with Margaret. Real adversity and challenge had brought out unsuspected strength in each. Two rather vague shadowy figures that had hitherto existed in the background of a forceful and energetic man's household had suddenly become human beings in their own right.

News of their affairs reached me at intervals during the next few weeks. The furniture and effects were sold and realized a sum that was just sufficient to cover the rent owing to the landlords. Margaret and Else moved to a small furnished room in one of the less expensive streets in South

Kensington, and Else, full of enthusiasm, began her training as a beauty specialist at once. But Margaret had no success in securing employment. There was, she said, plenty of domestic work going, but she still insisted that she was not yet reduced to that level.

"I've still a few odd coppers left," she told me on the telephone. "While I've got them I'll take my choice."

It is a curious thing that chance often succeeds in securing a desired end when application and persistence fail. So it was with Margaret. And quite by accident I was the instrument.

A friend of mine, who is a very keen bridge player—I suspect a not inconsiderable part of his income is derived from cards—lunched with me quite unexpectedly. He is a bachelor and spends his life changing his residence from hotel to hotel, chiefly, as he admits, in search of better bridge partners. We had met at the door of the restaurant and neither of us had seen the other for some time. Of course, we lunched together and naturally I asked him what he was doing.

"Oh, much the same as usual," he replied. "I'm staying at a new place now"—he named an hotel I had seen advertised recently. "It's only just opened, and they're making quite a feature of their cardroom. They've got some damned good bridge hostesses there, but the manager's difficulty is to find the right ones. He wants women with attractive personality, *savoir-faire*, and knowledge of how to dress, besides being really first-class players. Few of 'em stay long—and who can wonder? They get all sorts of people as partners, and their life must be hell. Yet I can't help thinking that for someone keen on the game, it wouldn't be too bad a job."

Almost instantaneously a phrase used by Margaret in the course of her ironic statement of her qualifications came into my mind. "I can play bridge . . ." she had said. Well I remembered it. In the old days in Hanover, there was no one her superior, and she had the very unusual characteristic

in a first-class player of being patient and tolerant with a not so good partner. I began to play with the idea, almost to the point of ignoring my friend's conversation, which was growing very technical and involved on some matter of bidding. He could never keep away from that topic for long.

That afternoon I wrote to Margaret and asked her to telephone me as soon as she could. She rang next morning.

"Listen," I said, "how good is your bridge these days?"

"Quite good," she replied, without any suggestion of boasting. "Luckily there are some other people in this house who are keen, and I manage to get in quite a lot."

"That's all right," I returned; and I told her what my friend had said and suggested she should call on the manager of the hotel.

She did not seem impressed by the idea. "Not very nice work, is it?" she asked doubtfully. "Two degrees above the streets—bridge hostess, dance hostess, and then the pavement."

"Oh, it's surely not as bad as that," I said. "It depends on the place. But there's no harm in trying, is there? You must be getting near the end of your resources now."

"That's true. I can't last much longer. All right—I'll try it, George. After all, I can always throw it up if I don't like it."

"Of course you can."

The very next day she rang again.

"I took your advice, George," she said. "I went down to that hotel yesterday afternoon. It's only ten minutes' walk from here, you know. Lovely place—looks almost too modern for England."

"What happened?" I asked, ignoring this thrust at my adopted country.

"Oh, Mr. Samuels, the manager, was very nice to me, and asked me a lot of questions that showed he's quite an expert on bridge. And then we chatted—I suppose to see if I could

talk and be entertaining. At the end he offered me the job on four weeks' trial. So I've accepted."

"The financial part satisfactory?"

"Not too bad," she replied. "But that depends on me to a large extent." She laughed, rather grimly I thought. "One more thing I've got to thank you for, George," she added.

"Leave the thanks till you know more about it," I replied. "You may not want to thank me later."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE FAIR WIND

PERIODICALLY I called on the Jacobis. In some way I felt responsible for their welfare, and my visits seemed to please them. Their small room was not at all attractive: a typical furnished bed-sitting-room, with dingy appointments suggestive of a past age. Furnished apartments in South Kensington, Bayswater, and Chelsea, provide one of the finest museums of Victorianism in the world, and an antiquarian-minded Government might well consider their preservation en masse as a warning to future generations. The room was a sad descent from the modernistic splendours of the house at Hanover, yet they seemed comfortable in it; and between them they had succeeded in adding little touches of brightness and individuality that gave it an air almost homelike. Yet I suspect that for all her outward acceptance of it, she found it irksome and distasteful. For so long she had lived in her own place, surrounded by the things of her own or her husband's choice that the mere thought of being set amid a stranger's goods depressed her.

They seemed reasonably contented. Else was doing well at her work and was said to have a natural flair for beauty culture, and Margaret, after a period of doubt, was settling down to her unusual position at the hotel. At first she had found it rather trying, but she had a natural interest in people as people—an interest that her secluded life with Isaac had tended to obscure—and as time went on she grew to like the work. It was exacting, trying, often exasperating—for there is no class of humanity shorter tempered or more given to argument than the bridge player. And Margaret had to deal with all sorts from the veriest beginner, who expected

his partner to perform miracles in the face of atrocious bidding and worse play, to the specialist expert who took for granted that Margaret must know his own particular variation of one or other of the various systems and conventions. After the first fortnight she was on the verge of throwing it up, but she held on, and at the end of the four weeks' probation she was engaged permanently by mutual consent.

When I called on her she would tell me many interesting and amusing things about the people she met, and often her hints conveyed more than her words. It was clear that bridge players, like dancers, sometimes think that the professional partner is necessarily also a professional lover, and she had had one or two difficult moments to live through.

It was perhaps not surprising. Though past her first youth and into middle age, she was still an attractive woman. Her experiences, and particularly her most recent trial, had given her face a greater calmness and there was a suggestion, lacking before, of depth and stability of character. She had, too, a fine sense of the fitting in dress. Her clothes were by no means expensive. Some of them were even on the point of shabbiness, in those first days when she had no funds behind her. But whatever she wore, she wore with an air of distinction. She must inevitably have impressed many men as an attractive personality. Combined with this personal appeal, there was no doubt about her being a really first-class player.

It took her only a comparatively short while to establish herself in the favour of the regular guests of the hotel, and her time became fully occupied. As she worked on a commission basis with the management this meant that her income rose sharply, and after three or four months little touches of easy circumstances began to show themselves in the home. Margaret and Else went out together more often when they had free time, and it was not always to the cheapest restaurants or seats in the theatre. The clothes

of both of them improved. In all things, it was clear that it was no longer a matter of making the best of what was available, but one of freedom to exercise a fairly wide choice. When Else should start earning money, I thought, the pair of them would be very comfortably off.

For the time being, at any rate, Margaret had got clear of the storm centre and was making easy running before a fair wind. Nor were there any storm clouds on the horizon. She had managed to get Isaac's estate properly wound up, paying all his debts in full, and I think this was a load off her mind. She wanted to wipe him clean away from the slate of her memory, so far as she was able.

In conversation, she never mentioned him directly or by name. If she referred to the past it was always in such oblique ways as 'in the old days', or 'before we came to England'. As time went on, she talked less and less of the past, which she no longer seemed to regret as she had in the Ealing days, but of the present and the future. She was intensely interested in Else's work and looked forward to her making a great success, and once or twice she hinted that she wanted to see the girl happily married—but never in Else's presence.

Else, too, had changed. She was much more self-reliant, and her whole being seemed concentrated on her career. It was difficult at times to imagine that this was the girl who had succumbed so readily to the blandishments of a man who had seen in her no more than a very useful match that would help him in his ambitions, only to drop her as soon as it suited his book. Like Margaret, she never referred to the past directly. She had indeed wiped it out completely. She was known as Miss Jacobi everywhere, and it is probable that very few people in England so much as suspected that she had ever been married.

If there was any reflection of her unhappy experiences in Else's life, it was in her attitude to marriage. If she discussed marriage at all, it was with a detached and uninterested air,

and she would assert quite flatly that she had no wish to be a wife but preferred to be independent in her own career. It was not that she was indifferent to men. Quite often she would go out with some friend introduced to her by her colleagues at work, or make up a party for an evening's entertainment. Invitations were not lacking, for she was far from unattractive, especially now she had assumed this air of self-confidence. But there her interest in men ended. She was prepared to amuse and be amused by them but not to accept any one of them as a permanent partner. On the face of it, this was the 'modern' attitude, the gesture of independence, but to me, who was able to observe her closely, it was evident that there was something of a fear of reaction in it. She had been disillusioned and abused once. She did not propose to repeat the experiment—not because she really disliked the idea but because she was definitely afraid of it.

So, in an atmosphere of rising prosperity and expanding friendship, the two Jacobis began life anew. The first shock over, I think they rather enjoyed the sense of adventure, though it might be doubted how long that might last; and from little signs I noticed, I was by no means convinced that Margaret's new-found self-control was really an entire revival of her personality. It was, I think, primarily a defence that might crack under any further exceptional strain. I prayed that nothing would happen to provide that strain.

Through Margaret's conversation I began to feel almost that I knew some of the regular bridge players at the hotel. There was old Cardey, for example, a benign old man between seventy and eighty, whose methods of bidding were so stereotyped that he might just as well have laid his hand on the table for the information of his partner and opponents. When he lost, which he did more often than not, he would always smile, apologize to his partner with a little bow, and complain that this bridge was nothing to the whist he used

to play as a young man. At the other extreme there was lean, saturnine Mathers, a Colonial administrator home on long leave, who seemed to have brought back from Africa some occult means of reading the cards hidden from him. He spoke little, praised never; yet Margaret felt he was always glad to play with her.

And there was David Godfrey. He came to her in the first place for lessons, explaining shyly that his play was very bad and that though he had had lessons before, he had never made much improvement. This was to be his last chance. If he failed this time, he would give up bridge for good. It soon became obvious to Margaret that he was one of those men who would never make cardplayers, just as there are some who cannot master the simplest mathematics or pick up more than a word or two of a foreign language, however hard they try. This caused a struggle in Margaret's conscience. Her honesty insisted that she should tell him as much as tactfully as possible. Her professional instinct counselled the reverse. Pupils were not common at the hotel, and even one meant a not inconsiderable addition to her income. She realized that with a little encouragement he would go on taking lessons and become a permanent source of revenue to her and the hotel—and her duty was to augment business for her employers.

That was how she put it when once she laid the problem before me—not in any way to seek advice on something that, after all, she would eventually have to decide for herself, but simply as a matter of interest. Yet I suspected that there was another and deeper reason, one that perhaps she herself did not suspect. She had a personal interest in the man. His name cropped up in conversation more often than any other, yet she saw him on the average not more than twice a week and considerably less than she did, say, Mathers, who was in the cardroom every day. And they obviously talked of many things other than bridge, for she knew so much about his circumstances and affairs. All this suggested

an intimacy rather closer than would exist normally between a bridge instructor and her pupil, especially as she was fond of stressing his shyness and retiring character.

David Godfrey was quite a good bit younger than Margaret, but, like many men of retiring and studious habits, he gave the appearance of being older than his years. He was an engineer and a widower. Like Margaret, he had a background of tragedy to his life, though his was but grey compared to the blackness of hers, and this may have provided them with a common attraction. When he had been only twenty-six he had married a girl who had been a friend of the family all her life. The marriage had every prospect of being successful, especially when, some four years later, a boy was born. But from that moment, ill-luck seemed to have descended upon him.

The child, so far from being a unifying influence, seemed to disrupt all the pleasant relations that had hitherto existed. David Godfrey was not disposed to assign blame to anyone, but even he realized that everything had sprung from a war between his wife and his mother for the child's affections. Like so many grandmothers, David's mother appeared to believe that her son's child was her own and actively resented the mother's claim to it. So the trouble had started, eventually reaching such a pitch that Irene, David's wife, had asked to be sent with the boy into the country for a little peace.

Reluctantly, for David had a very strong attachment to his mother and did not wish to offend her however slightly and even for his wife's sake, he at last agreed. After some search, he found a cottage in Hampshire, which he rented for Irene, and there she went with the baby. Meanwhile, David went to live with his mother.

It was a separation that was destined never to be followed by a reunion. Irene went one day into Winchester to do some shopping, and at the very foot of King Alfred's statue she slipped and fell beneath a bus, the driver of which had no

chance of pulling up. Within a couple of hours she had died of her injuries.

This was a terrible blow for David, and for a while he was distracted, but his natural equanimity kept him from the wilder excesses of grief. The boy was brought home to his grandmother, who took charge of him with every sign of having scored a victory—as though Irene's tragic death had been specially engineered by Fate so that Julia Godfrey could control her grandchild.

These events had happened practically a year before David met Margaret, but the effects of the disaster were still clinging to him. Despite his natural phlegm, which may well have been an inability to experience any really deep emotion, he had developed one peculiar phobia. So far, he had been unable to revisit the house he and Irene had occupied. He had been to it once to collect certain articles he needed, and since then he had never returned to it, though he fully realized that one day he would have to do so. And, curiously, he found it difficult for the time being to get on with his son. It was this which had led him to adopt for a while an hotel existence. He hoped that in a new environment, placed more or less publicly in contact with fresh faces, and leading a life to which he was entirely unaccustomed, he might find some sort of relief from troubles which, he knew, he must overcome if he were not to become neurotic.

Later on, I was destined to meet David on a good many occasions, but then I knew nothing of him but Margaret's descriptions. But these were so many and so varied that even at that time he became far more than a shadowy name to me. I felt I already knew David, and it says much for Margaret's veracity that when, afterwards, I met him, nothing about him—neither his appearance nor his manner nor his character—either surprised or disappointed me.

Through Margaret's eyes I could witness the friendship between them ripening, and often I speculated whither it would lead. There was a marked disparity between their

ages, and it was the wrong way round; for though a fairly large age difference between marriage partners passes almost unnoticed when the woman is the younger, there are always headshakings and doubts when the woman is the older. The sceptics are no doubt animated chiefly by prejudice and convention, yet for once those bugbears are founded on good sound biology. Yet I wondered all the same whether friendship would turn to marriage, and even then I was inclined to think it would.

From what Margaret had told me, I believed I had a pretty good idea of David's psychological make-up. He was an only son and had been spoilt and coddled by his mother, on whom he had come to depend utterly. Marriage to a girl younger than himself had caused something of a crisis in him, for he had felt unable to throw himself into dependence on the young wife as his whole ego demanded he should. Hence, I argued, his apparent passivity in the war over his own child, in which any normal man would have stood up boldly and uncompromisingly for his own and his wife's natural rights, no matter what the cost to his mother.

Going further, my speculations suggested that, having broken the strictly maternal tie by marrying and thus asserting his independence to some extent, he was reluctant to assume it again in its entirety, and it was this which made him feel uncomfortable at his mother's home even though his son was there. If I had been a complete Freudian, which I am very far from being, I might have gone even further and said that unconsciously he resented seeing his own son take the place he himself had formerly occupied in his mother's affections. But that, probably, would be going too far; and in any event my analysis was pure guesswork when I had not even met the man.

It was into this situation that Margaret was introduced. He was obviously attracted to her in some way from the first. Her ready sympathy no doubt appealed to him, and almost unknown to himself he might have begun to feel that here was

a partner to whom he could transfer all his thwarted affection for his mother.

These speculations caused me quite a lot of amusement, for they showed how easy it was to build up a case by the aid of modern psychological theory. It all looked very complete and convincing—till I reminded myself that, if I adopted the theories of one of the other schools of psychology I should probably arrive at an entirely different conclusion, which, again, would be in complete contrast to interpretation by a third.

Whether these psychological flights were in the right direction or not, there can be no doubt that the friendship was growing fast. Margaret went out to dinner with him one night, and thereafter these excursions became more frequent. On one occasion, he came to the apartments in South Kensington, and it so happened that it was on a night when I had had some intention of calling but was delayed at the last moment by an urgent call. Our first meeting was thus postponed for some considerable time.

Shortly after this visit, Margaret raised the question of marriage outright. She told me she wanted to ask my advice, not as a doctor, but as a friend. She was so portentous about it that I had to smile to myself.

"Tell me, George," she said seriously, "what is your real opinion of marriages when the man is much younger than the woman?"

I shot a quick glance at her. Her meaning was plain enough to me after all my thoughts, but I answered her honestly.

"Well, I think it's not the sort of thing you can generalize about," I replied. "Everything depends upon the particular man and the particular woman. In some cases it may be disastrous; in others it may be ideal. If you mean, what do I think of your marrying David Godfrey, then I think it might be one of the successful cases—but I haven't met the man. All I know of him is through your accounts, and you

may be prejudiced in his favour." I chuckled as she blushed slightly.

"You are very discerning," she remarked. "But that is what I was thinking about. As a matter of fact, he asked me last night whether I'd marry him, but he didn't want an answer at once. He said he'd prefer me to think it over, because, after all, it wasn't just himself concerned, but the boy also."

"The only advice I can give you, Margaret, is the same as I should give to anyone who asked me about marrying, irrespective of any question of age. I can only say 'be honest with yourself'. If you really feel you want to marry him for himself, and you feel sure that he wants to marry you for the same reason, there's nothing more to be said, is there? It isn't a matter for an outsider to push his nose into."

"You're very sympathetic, George," she said, without the slightest suggestion of sarcasm, though my vague, colourless replies might easily have brought some retort. "You really don't think the age business matters at all?"

"Not if you're quite satisfied. You ought to take it into account before you finally make up your mind, but that's all."

"Thank you, George. What would I do without you?"

"In this thing, at any rate, you'd do exactly what you'd have done in any case," I replied with a smile. She laughed.

So it had happened, I reflected as I made my way home a little later. My speculations had not been so far from the truth, then—though what the motivation was I could not say; and certainly David would have been the last to admit the unconscious urges I had quite gratuitously pinned to him.

The whole business seemed quite typical of what I had heard of him. This was no *affaire passionnelle*. Neither David nor Margaret was being swept away by the infatuation of the moment. There was the leisurely air of a business deal between friends. He had told her to think it over and make up her mind. Here was no lover waiting, trembling, for his

beloved's answer, on which, he felt, the fate of the whole world hung.

Nor was Margaret herself in the throes of one of those belated passions in which older women sometimes find themselves. I do not think that then she would have allowed herself to kindle the flame of burning love in her heart. More and more she was giving me the impression of a woman riding herself on a tight rein. Externally she was calm, controlled, reasonable, taking life as it came and making the most of things as they happened. Yet beneath were dangerous forces at work, just as the terrific geological forces of the earth are constantly at work beneath the most lovely countryside, and one day the whole of a peaceful valley is swept away by the crashing of some mountain-side. There could be no room for both these forces and passion side by side in Margaret's soul.

Nevertheless I was convinced she was genuinely fond of him. If it was not the assertive desire of youth it was the quiet, even affection of later life. Nor, for that matter, do I think that Margaret had ever been capable of that searing passion which burns all things from its path. She had never loved Isaac in that way. Thinking back on what I had heard of the way they had met and married, I felt that that, too, had had the same quality of placidity about it. There is nothing wrong in this. On the contrary, such affection, based on clear recognition of reason, is more likely to endure than the torch which enraptured youth brings into the arena of love and that all too often blazes itself out.

If Margaret married David—and I felt sure she would consent—I believed then that it would lead to happiness of a quiet, uneventful kind. The prospect pleased me. It might mean peace for both; and it was that for which both sought ardently.

## CHAPTER XVI

### DESTINY'S ACE

MY CALLS on the Jacobis ceased almost entirely soon after that question of Margaret's marriage had been discussed. I was preparing to get married myself, and other people's affairs tend to fade into insignificance beside that event in a man's life. For some time after, in fact, I did not even know what decision Margaret had reached.

News came to me through one of those chance encounters which have punctuated the whole of my connexion with the Jacobis. I was in the West End, shopping, when I suddenly became aware of an extremely smartly dressed young woman smiling familiarly at me. For a moment, I did not recognize her and thought perhaps some mistake was being made, and then I realized who it was. It was Else.

She had changed enormously. Her clothes were not only smart at a first glance—many inferior ones attain to that. They were well cut and finely tailored, and reflected the latest fashion as closely as a classic suit can. Her hat was one of those confections that seem to have been made in a capricious moment by some fairy milliner with a few oddments of tulle on his hands, material that he has twisted roguishly together and dropped nonchalantly on some passing female head. And it was quite obvious that her training in beauty culture had induced her to give great care to her face. I have rarely seen a woman's face so perfectly made-up. There was nothing startling about it; it was simply complete, one of those superb works of art which, without slavishly copying nature, achieve utter inevitability by their sheer perfection. It was a fairly long time since I had seen her, for she was usually out in the evenings when I called upon Margaret.

"Hullo, George," she said brightly. "I'm trying to make up my mind whether I shall forgive you or not. You were on the point of walking straight by me, and I had to forget all the rules in my book on how a lady should behave and attract your attention."

Her very voice was surprising. She had never spoken like this in the old days. In truth the chrysalis had evolved into the very beautiful butterfly.

"I scarcely recognized you," I replied.

"Have I changed so much, then? It's marvellous how just a little rouge and lipstick can deceive you men."

We chatted for a little while, and I asked about Margaret. Else laughed.

"The bride-to-be," she said. "You knew she was engaged to the Godfrey man, I suppose?"

"I didn't know for sure," I returned, "but I expected she would be."

"Very romantic." She suddenly dropped her banter. "Seriously, I'm very glad. It's what she needs, and it'll take her out of herself. She's very fond of him, too, and she's almost a new woman. You haven't been to see her lately, have you?"

"No," I said. "But it's not that I'm keeping out of the way. I've my own affairs to attend to just now, and life is rather full."

"Yes, of course, you're getting married, too. I seem to be the only one who's keeping her head." She laughed.

"Perhaps you'll join us all soon," I responded.

She made a grimace. "I don't think so. Men are quite amusing in variety, but to have one tagging round all the time . . ." And she made a gesture of dismissal. "When one's got one's freedom, it's foolish to throw it away."

"I suppose we all think that some time or other," I said. "But I'm glad you're pleased about your mother's engagement. I thought perhaps you might disapprove."

"But why?" She lifted her exquisitely shaped eyebrows. "I think it's one of the best things Mother's ever done. Of course, David's a little bit of a bore and a stick-in-the-mud, and he's far too much under his mother's thumb." She was suddenly very serious again. "George, that's what worries me. I can't help thinking that that ghastly mother of his will make trouble. I've met her once, and she was just too sweet for words—just like the great spoonful of jam Mother used to hide my powders in. That's the very thought I had when I met her. Do you think she will?"

I shook my head. "How can I tell? I haven't met the son, let alone the mother. But that's something they can take care of themselves. If he's marrying, he's making a choice, and if there's any argument, there's only one course for him. It may be hard for a man to have to choose between his wife and his mother, but there it is."

She nodded doubtfully. "Yes, I know. But I can't help wondering whether David's got the guts to stand up to the old girl. Apparently he didn't very much during his first marriage."

Again I shook my head. "Those things must be left to work themselves out," I observed. "And how are you getting on yourself? Are you the fully trained beauty specialist yet?"

She smiled with enthusiasm. "Yes," she replied. "I finished my apprenticeship about a month ago, and now I'm waiting for a job. Of course, there are plenty I could walk into if I just didn't mind and it was a question of a job at any price, but I'm in no hurry just now. I'm aiming high at the moment, and I've hopes it'll come off. If it doesn't"—she shrugged—"there will still be the others."

"You deserve to get something good," I returned. "I know you've worked hard, and you're keen, aren't you?"

Her eyes lit up. "Yes. It's great work. I can't say why, because if you think of it it's all rather silly, just painting women's faces, so to speak."

"That's what some people think of plastic surgery," I commented. "But you want to think a little deeper than that. Isn't anything that helps men and women to be a little happier and feel more contented with themselves worth while? And isn't there a lot to be said for anything that helps a human being to be more self-confident and at ease with the world? It's not a very cheering place just now, is it?"

It was the late summer of 1939, and the shadow of war was close enough to make us all feel cold. If one could have foretold the future, one would have known that within a fortnight the dogs of war would have been loosed. But luckily it is not given to us to look into the future. It is hard enough to bear misfortune and hardship when they come. How many of us could stand up to them if we knew for certain that we should have to endure them at such and such pre-ordained times? Fortune-tellers thrive on predicting either trivialities or success. No seer would make a living if he could genuinely outline all the tribulations of mankind.

Else nodded in response to my remarks. "That's an argument. I suppose you have to say things like that when people round on plastic surgery, George. I'll remember that. And by the by, if I get any clients who want a face lifted or a nose reshaped, I'll send them along to you. The place I hope to go to should have plenty of them."

"Thank you, Else," I said. "Where is this place?"

But she refused to say more than that I would be surprised if I knew. I could see no reason for this secrecy, but no doubt it was just a whim of hers. I did not press her, and after a few more desultory remarks we parted. I watched as she walked away and marvelled anew at the change in her. Here were poise, polish, and self-confidence in all their glory. She was a living model of what those expensive clients she hoped to have should be. And I wondered how many of those who, almost inevitably, glanced keenly at her as she walked along, guessed that she was a mere beauty-culturist, as they call themselves, and one without a job at that.

In the next day or two, busy though I was, both with my work and with my private affairs, I found myself thinking of Margaret quite often, and I determined I would pay her another call as soon as I was able. About ten days after that encounter with Else I was once again ringing the bell at the shabby but highly respectable house in South Kensington.

It was Margaret herself who answered the door. She was looking bright and well. Her eyes were sparkling and she held herself erect as though ready to face anything the world might throw at her.

"Why, George!" she exclaimed. "This is a surprise—and a very welcome one after all this time. Do come in. You've arrived just at the right time, too—I can introduce you to David."

"I hope I'm not intruding," I said.

"Not a bit. I've told David so much about you that he's anxious to meet you. And do you know," she added with a smile, "I do believe he's a little bit jealous."

"You talk too much, Margaret," I returned, with mock severity. "I shall expect to be growing wings and a halo soon."

She chuckled and led me into the dining-room.

Change seemed to be the order of the day among the Jacobis. There was Else with a brand-new personality. There was Margaret, who, as Else had said, was looking a new woman. And this room had completely altered its appearance. It had been refurnished with taste and discretion. The faded Victorian trophies had been relegated to some other mysterious place and replaced by much more modern articles.

But I had little time to look about me. A man in his middle thirties rose to his feet as I entered, and I found myself being introduced to David Godfrey, fiancé of Margaret Jacobi.

As I have said earlier, neither his appearance nor his manner was any surprise to me. I seemed to know him well

already. He was the sort of man one remembered by his sheer neutrality. His hair was neither dark nor fair. His face, though pleasant, was utterly undistinguished, except, perhaps, by the somewhat strikingly weak chin and mouth. His clothes had the suave uniformity of the multiple-tailors' product. When he spoke, he did so in a register that was neither tenor nor baritone, but ranged between each. I do not think I have ever met a man less blessed with personality than David Godfrey—unless the apotheosis of negation can be considered personality.

I tried to make some conversation but he seemed in some difficulties. He was abominably shy in an awkward schoolboyish manner. If he had had just a trace more aggressiveness in him, that shyness would have compensated itself in some form of assertion and rudeness—but I could not imagine David asserting himself in any circumstances, nor could I imagine him being rude to anyone, however great the provocation. It would be against the rules of respectability; and respectability, I gathered, was his god.

The war had then just begun, and it was, of course, the supreme topic of the day, and at last I got David talking on it. He was most concerned with the part he might play in it. He realized that he was of possible military age and might, therefore, be called up, but in those days almost anyone with the slightest sort of technical appointment was in a 'reserved occupation', and he believed that, as an engineer, he would remain out of the Forces. His general attitude to the whole political situation was, as one might have expected, non-committal. He was the plain man with no political tendencies. He was content to leave things to those who knew. And I gathered what was also not entirely unexpected that he was a thoroughly loyal member of the Conservative Party, to whom the leader of the moment had something not far from papal infallibility.

I cannot say that I was particularly impressed, and I was far more interested in watching Margaret's reactions to him

than I was in the man himself. She was obviously very, very fond of him. Every time his glance met hers, she smiled slightly, and there was a soft expression in her eyes whenever she looked at him. It was not the look of the lover, but rather that of the mother for a favourite child who is, perhaps, in special need of care and protection. That night I must have been in an analytical and reminiscent mood, for I remember how, when I intercepted one of those glances, all my psychological speculations centring on the mother-complex rushed into my mind.

Margaret gave us coffee and light refreshment, and as soon as I could, without outraging politeness, I left. Curiously enough, on my way into the street I met Else.

"George!" she exclaimed. "Fancy seeing you again. They say it never rains but it pours. So you've managed to look Mother up again. I'm so glad. Is David up there?"

"Yes." I nodded.

"So you've met the great lover." There was a touch of affectionate irony in her voice. "And what's the verdict?" She looked me straight in the eyes.

I hesitated, and she laughed.

"Exactly," she said, lightly touching my arm. "He does have that effect at a first meeting. You don't know what to say. Dumb," she added, smiling in a way that took away all thoughts of malice, "dumb and not even beautiful. But Mother likes him and that's all that matters."

"Got that job yet?" I asked, anxious to turn the subject.

She gave me a glance that indicated quite clearly she had seen through my move. Her eyes danced.

"Yes. But I shan't be starting for another few weeks, though I can go there to get the hang of their own little ways. Every place has its own 'system', you know."

"So I gather from the advertisements. And every system is invariably the best of its kind, implying that every other one is a mere fraud. Will you tell me now where it is?"

She named a very famous house in Mayfair, a firm known in two continents. I was surprised, for I knew how difficult it was for outsiders to secure positions with that particular concern. As a rule, the staff was recruited from those who had paid a premium for the privilege of learning in the firm's own cubicles. Else's success was a tribute to her ability and talents, and I congratulated her warmly.

"Yes," she said composedly, "I feel quite proud of myself. I'm the first one they've taken from outside for more than a couple of years. And I didn't have any special introductions. It will be something to live up to, but I think I shall get by."

"I'm sure you will," I responded, and went on my way. The change in that young woman was astonishing. Her self-confidence and enthusiasm were something quite unknown to the old Else. Perhaps, I thought, the fact that she used to be so negative herself and has escaped from it makes her a little impatient of David, who seemed the kind of person to kiss the chains that bound him.

That was actually the last call I ever made at the South Kensington address. My own affairs were moving fast and I was utterly absorbed in them. For several weeks the Jacobis went out of my mind. I went on my honeymoon.

It was the telephone that recalled me to their affairs. Always, it seemed, that sharply jetting bell was the messenger that brought the news of fresh tragedies to that ill-starred family.

Even on his honeymoon, a doctor cannot entirely cut himself off from his profession, but I had made arrangements so that I should not be disturbed unnecessarily. A colleague of mine had agreed to see any patients who felt they ought to call for me, and if he decided that my attendance was really necessary, I was prepared to go. But not otherwise. This call was from him, my friend, Dr. Lesley.

"Listen, Sava," he said, "you know I wouldn't trouble you unless I thought it necessary. There's a case here that

I think I ought to tell you about, because the people appear to be personal friends of yours. The Jacobis. All right?"

"The Jacobis?" What had happened now? My astonishment as I uttered those two words was conveyed along the miles of wire.

"Yes. It's pretty serious," Lesley went on. "You know the daughter?"

"Else?" I prompted.

"I think that was the name," he said. "The mother got on the phone and said she must see you—it was a matter of life and death and so on, so they put her on to me. The girl has been very badly burnt—how badly I don't know, because I haven't seen her, but it seems a pretty bad case. I thought I'd better let you know, for the mother was most insistent, and I seem to remember your mentioning their name at some time or another. I'm going along to the hospital and I'll ring you and report later."

I thanked him and hung up reflectively. So something else had happened to the Jacobis. That spring of theirs—that second spring—had not lasted long. This time it was Else. But it was no good speculating. I could trust Lesley to give me an accurate picture of the case. Nonetheless I made certain initial preparations. No man—not even a doctor—likes being recalled to his daily work when he is enjoying his honeymoon, but here there were obligations I could not refuse if they were laid upon me.

Lesley's next call came through early next day. The mere fact that he had not rung again within an hour or so hinted to me that I should not be required, and I had allowed myself to imagine that this was because the injuries had been exaggerated and that adequate treatment was being provided. His words quickly dispelled those hopes.

"It's a terrible case," he said brusquely—he has a habit of speaking like that, especially when he is somewhat moved. "I can't remember having seen a worse burn case. There's

practically nothing left of the face, and the body has been affected, too."

"You think I'd better come up?"

"No." His voice was decisive. "It's no good, Sava—absolutely no good. She'll be dead before you can reach London. I gave her the night and perhaps a few hours more. She seems a pretty hardy woman."

"How did it happen?"

"I haven't got all the details yet. I'll let you know," he replied.

"And how is Margaret—the mother—taking it?" I asked.

"Very badly indeed. I've had a look at her, and I've recommended that she be detained in the hospital. I've a feeling she may do something silly if she's allowed to roam off on her own."

"That's very likely. She's had a lot of trouble in her life, and I doubt whether she can take any more."

"Well, of course, I didn't know anything of her history, but that's what her condition suggested to me."

"Thank you, for all you've done, Lesley."

"That's all right. I'll let you know when she dies."

He spoke the last few words in that matter-of-fact tone which told me it was indeed hopeless. He is not a man given to alarmism.

Two hours later, the telephone rang again. I was waiting for it.

"Lesley speaking," said the familiar voice. "The girl's dead, Sava. She died quite painlessly—we put her to sleep, of course. The only thing to do. And the mother's being kept there. I'm awfully sorry."

"Not your fault. Thanks for your help, Lesley." I rang off and wandered gloomily to my room.

Else was dead. It was all the more tragic in that she had only recently come to life as it were. I thought of her as I had last seen her—almost the perfect woman, delighted at

her new-found success both in her work and as a personality, filled with the joy of life and living. And I imagined that face, which had been so beautifully cultured, burnt horribly. There are, to me, no injuries worse than burns, which scar and disfigure. None of the old adages is more true than that which asserts fire to be man's greatest servant and his greatest enemy.

And I marvelled again at the malign fate which persisted in dogging Margaret. No sooner did she attain to some sort of peace than it struck once more, and on each occasion its blow seemed shrewder and more devastating. I had thought that the game had been played out, and that Destiny had put the last card on the table when Isaac had died and his secret history been revealed. But here was an ace kept up the sleeve.

At any rate, I thought, she is not alone. There is David to look after her, and I knew that Lesley would keep an eye on her progress. Then I thought of David. What good would he be in a crisis? Would it, striking at his fiancée, the woman of whom he was undoubtedly very fond, rouse him to new heights? I found it difficult to imagine, yet no one can predict human behaviour. Often it is the strong personality that is blown over by the storm, while the weak and insignificant rise above themselves. I hoped that it would so in this case, though I doubted it. I remembered that weak chin and mouth. I recalled the whole lack of decision and aggression. My only hope was that my doubts were wrong.

## CHAPTER XVII

### NIGHTMARE

LESLEY did not ring again, and I learnt no more till I returned. I made it one of my first duties to find out as much as I could about the affair. All I knew was that Else had been horribly burnt and had died of her injuries, and that Margaret had been detained in hospital. Lesley, I found, had gathered most of the facts for me.

"First of all," he said, with that lecture-room air he often adopts, "let's get the mother out of the way. We kept her in hospital a couple of days, and managed to calm her a bit, and then we had to discharge her. You know what it's like now for beds, with all this E. M. S. business."

"Where did she go?"

He shook his head. "She went away with a man, much younger than herself, who said he was going to marry her."

"That would be David Godfrey," I said.

"I believe it was some such name. I've got a note of it here for you, because I was told to communicate with him if anything arose. But since then the hospital had a letter from her solicitor, a man named Adler, who's got everything in hand."

"Did you see much of Godfrey? How did he take it?"

Lesley gave a quick, depreciatory smile and shrugged. "Not very well. He seemed quite unable to cope with any situation of that sort, to put it bluntly. Still, she had to go, and he was prepared to take her and seemed to have some standing in the matter, so what else could we do?"

"Nothing. I rather expect he'll be pretty helpless."

"Passive, dependent type, entirely negative," said Lesley briefly. "That's all I can tell you about her."

"Thanks for remembering it all. Did you find out how it happened?"

He nodded. "Yes. The sort of story you'll find in any local paper at least once a year. The girl had just started in some good job or other . . ."

"Yes," I interposed. "I knew she was going to do that."

"I see. Well, the mother had made her a present—one of those silk house-gowns or whatever you call them—you know the sort of thing: an elaborate dressing-gown really. And they'd had a celebration—a theatre and dinner. The girl had gone off with her boy friend after the theatre and the mother with her fiancé. Well, it seems the girl got home first, rather the worse for wear, and she took off her dress and slipped on this gown affair and sat down to wait for her mother. She dropped off to sleep in front of the fire—and, well, you can guess what happened. The thing burst into flames. She did not know what to do but ran round in circles, not only fanning her own flames but setting the room on fire as well, and when her mother came back, she found someone had called the fire brigade and her daughter was being rushed off in an ambulance."

"Didn't anyone go to help her?" I asked in astonishment. "She must have cried out, and they only lived in apartments. There were plenty of other people in the house."

"No. That was just the bad luck in the whole business. The house was empty that night. The majority of the people have evacuated themselves or been evacuated, and apparently there's only one other room occupied—and that by an A.R.P. worker who's out almost every night after black-out."

"My God!" I exclaimed. It was one of those situations which, if a novelist had put it in a book, would have been dismissed by the critics as straining coincidence too far.

"Yes," he said nodding slowly. "It's a terrible business. It's an old story, that fire caused through going to sleep in front of a coal fire, but it's none the less awful when it happens to someone you know. As for the case itself, well, you don't

need to be told about that. Some of the burns were fourth degree. Even if a miracle had happened and she'd recovered, she'd have been a ghastly sight for life. Even your plastic surgery couldn't have done much for her, and I rather imagine her right arm would have been useless. In that sense, her death was the best thing that could have happened."

"I agree with you, Lesley. It's clear I could have done nothing. You did everything I could have asked of you—and more."

"Not at all, not at all. These things happen."

It was right that I could have done nothing so far as Else was concerned, but what of Margaret? She had disappeared it seemed, and though Lesley had not said much about her, it was clear she was in a bad state. I recalled all the forebodings I had had if she ever had to bear another blow, and I was worried. I decided to look up David Godfrey and see what I could find out.

The only address I had of his was the hotel where Margaret worked as a bridge hostess. I did not ask for her, guessing that she had probably forgotten all about such things as earning a living, but for Mr. Godfrey. The reception clerk shook his head.

"He left here a fortnight ago," he said.

"Did he leave no address?"

The man looked at me dubiously and I read his thoughts. He was wondering whether I had any right to inquire.

"Listen," I said, eager to put his doubts at rest. "I am really looking for Mrs. Jacobi who used to work here as a bridge hostess. When she left hospital, she gave Mr. Godfrey's address for all communications. I am her doctor, and I was away when the tragedy occurred."

"I see, sir." He still seemed doubtful so I showed him my card, and that completely convinced him. It is wonderful what a small piece of printed pasteboard will do sometimes. He gave me an address in Bayswater.

I departed at once in the car. Before going to the hotel I had thought of looking up Adler, the solicitor, but I did not know his address, and there seemed no entry under his name in the telephone book. I discovered later he was the senior partner in a firm which retained a title it had had fifty years before—and none of the original partners had been an Adler.

The house in Bayswater was a shabby enough place, and I thought at first I had come to the wrong place. But I had made a note of the address and there was no mistake. A rather slatternly woman answered the door.

"Mr. Godfrey?" she repeated in answer to my inquiry. "Go up to the first floor, and knock at the door facing the top of the staircase."

I followed these rather vague instructions doubtfully, but the door at which I knocked proved to be the right one. David himself opened it to me. He blinked at me for a moment, apparently failing to recognize me.

"Oh, it's Mr. Sava," he said in a dispirited voice. "Come in."

"Thank you," I replied.

I looked quickly about me. It is a habit I have when I enter a strange room. Probably all doctors acquire it, for one can learn so much from a person's home environment. This was not at all prepossessing. The furniture was sparse and in the last stages of hard use. It was a bed-sitting-room—or, as I suppose the landlady would have described it, a flatlet, for there was a basin with running water and a small electric cooker in the corner. The place was ill-cleaned and dusty.

"I'm looking for Margaret," I said, coming quickly to the point. "Where is she?"

He shook his head dully. "I don't know," he said in a dead voice.

"You don't know?" I cried. "But she went away from hospital with you, and left your address. Damn it all man, you must know."

Again he shook his head in the same lifeless manner.

"No. I don't know. She went away, and I can't find her."

"But this is ridiculous. You ought to know. There's no point in hanging out where I'm concerned. I want to see what sort of state she's in."

"She's distracted," he said. "When we left the hospital, I took her to Mother's. I gave up my room at the hotel because I hated the sight of the place. It was where Margaret had looked so happy. Then I came here. It was the first place I found. Four days ago Mother told me Margaret had walked out. I think there'd been words of some kind."

"Didn't you do anything about it?" The only way to get anything out of him was to ply him with questions apparently.

"I went to her old address, but she'd gone away, they said, after paying three weeks in advance. Not that there was much left there after the fire."

"Nothing else?"

"What could I have done?"

"Told the police. Got in touch with Adler, her solicitor. Pull yourself together, Godfrey. It's no good sitting down and waiting for her to turn up. Heavens above, you care for her, don't you?"

"Yes. Of course I do."

"Yet you're content to let her go like this, knowing that she's probably in the state of mind when she'd do anything. This won't do at all. Tell me, do you know Adler's address?"

"I've got it somewhere."

"Then give it to me."

I waited with rising impatience while he sorted through the papers in his wallet. But he drew a blank there, and he passed his hand wearily over his forehead as though trying to revive his memory. Then he went to a suitcase and drew out a tattered manilla file. After a few minutes' search through its bulging contents, he handed me a letter. I

glanced at the heading and noted that the name of 'G. Adler' appeared as senior partner of the firm. The address was in the City.

It was still afternoon and I decided to take a chance on seeing Adler without an appointment. For a moment or two I hesitated whether to ask Godfrey to accompany me, but I decided against it. He would be no positive help, and he might well prove a hindrance. There he sat, staring in front of him, looking as though he had just had a heavy punch in the pit of the stomach. It was a pitiable sight, yet I could feel little sympathy for him. He had failed miserably.

As I stood looking at him, some words of Else's came back to me. She had suspected there might be trouble between Margaret and David's mother. Had it developed so soon, and at a time of crisis like this? I smiled grimly to myself. There were the makings of a very nasty situation in all this. If David were unable or unwilling to do anything, then the duty of finding Margaret and trying to put matters straight obviously lay with me. It was a nice homecoming from a honeymoon.

Accordingly I thanked him for his information—though he paid little heed to what I said—and let myself out of the house. By avoiding the congested main roads I made my way to the City and heaved a sigh of relief when I found Adler's offices were still open. The clerk seemed doubtful when I asked if I could see his principal.

"Tell him my business is urgent," I said. "It concerns Mrs. Jacobi."

He opened his eyes at that and departed into an inner office, from which he emerged a minute or two later to announce that Mr. Adler would see me at once.

Adler was a short, quiet-voiced, but very keen-eyed Jew. He gave me a piercing, assessing glance as I walked in and pulled forward a chair for me.

"I'm glad to meet you at last, Mr. Sava," he said. "Margaret has told me a lot about you. You arrived just in

time. Another five minutes and I should probably have been gone. Now what is it?"

"Where is Margaret?" I asked.

"H'm! I wish I knew. I was hoping you'd come to tell me. All I know is that she left Mrs. Godfrey's house four days ago and hasn't been seen since."

"So David told me."

"David!" He slurred the word with irony. "I'm afraid that, pleasant as he may be, that gentleman is not to be relied upon for very much help at a time like this."

"Have you told the police?"

He nodded. "Yes. They seemed a little dubious since the absence was so short, but when I explained the details and told them she was in a possibly dangerous state, they agreed to take action. So far, they've not reported any results."

"That's probably hopeful. A live person is more difficult to find than a dead body," I said grimly.

He looked at me sharply.

"You mean . . . ?"

I nodded. "Yes. From what I know of Margaret's condition, this affair may have made her decide that life isn't worth living any more. She very nearly did after Isaac's death, you remember. But then her attitude was negative. She was prostrated and was inclined to take no measures to go on living. This time, I fear her attitude may be more positive and drive her to contemplate actual suicide."

"You seriously alarm me," he said gravely. "I hadn't thought it was as bad as that. But you've known her a long time and have been her doctor, so I wouldn't think of disputing what you say. Can you suggest anything else we can do? The police are acting, and I'll telephone them again to liven them up a bit—if it's possible to hasten our wonderful policemen. They will have covered all the likely places where she might turn up, I expect."

"There doesn't seem anything else to be done," I agreed, feeling that, after all, we were almost as helpless as David.

"It's not a very satisfactory position," he said. "I like it very much less in view of what you've just told me. Can I have your address and telephone number, so that I can get into instant touch with you if I obtain any news. I feel that if we find her, she will be in need of your services more than mine."

"I'm afraid so," I returned, and gave him both my home and my Harley Street telephone numbers. As an after-thought I added the hospital number, for I remembered I would be operating there all the next morning.

There the matter had to be left. As I drove away—Adler having refused a lift on the ground that the Underground station was only a few yards away—I felt, in spite of everything, a little more cheerful. I liked Adler. He seemed quiet and very competent, and I felt sure that if anything else could be done to trace Margaret, he would think of it.

The night and next morning passed without any further news, and my anxiety grew, though I still clung to my belief that if she had committed suicide, we should learn of it quickly. She was not likely to try any subtle means: it would probably be the river or the gas-oven. In either event, the body would quickly come to light. But as each hour passed, even this hope grew weak.

It was getting on for four o'clock—I remember the hour because while I was telephoning my afternoon tea was brought in to me—when my telephone bell rang. I was told that a hospital in South London, which was no more than a vague name to me, wished to speak to me. Wonderingly, I took the call.

"Mr. Sava?" asked a woman's voice.

"Yes. Speaking," I replied.

"Mr. George Sava?" the voice insisted.

"That's correct."

"This is the matron of the hospital speaking," she continued. "Do you know anyone named Margaret Jacobi? Excuse my troubling you like this but . . ."

"Margaret Jacobi!" I exclaimed, almost shouting. "You have news of her?" And then I added in a less excited voice. "Is she alive or dead?"

"I can hear you do know her," the matron said, with perhaps a touch of sarcasm. "She is here, and she is alive. She was brought in an hour ago and kept asking for someone called 'George'. When we asked her for further details, all she would say was 'my doctor'. At last she added the name 'Sava', and so I took the liberty of ringing you up, doctor, as you're the only one of that name in the book—or in the medical directory for that matter."

"Tell me," I asked eagerly, "what is the matter with her?"

"Collapse," replied the matron briefly. "She's in a very bad state. I think, doctor, as she keeps calling for you, you had better come as soon as you can."

"I will. Within an hour or two."

My first move was to telephone Adler. Only a few minutes before he had had word from the police, and he had been on the point of ringing me to tell me the news. I asked him if he would care to come along with me, but he declined. He saw no particular purpose in his coming.

It was a long journey, and it was already black-out time when I started, but eventually, after several checks, I found the hospital. I was taken to a small private ward.

"We moved her here from the general ward," the matron explained, "because her ramblings were upsetting the other patients, and this was the only spare bed we had. Actually, of course, this is really a ward for paying patients."

"Don't worry about that," I replied. "I'll see the almoner and put it right." I turned to the house physician who had attended to Margaret. "What do you make of it?" I asked.

He told me. She was obviously suffering from physical collapse as the result of want of food, but it was her mental condition that was the chief worry. She was wandering a lot and—at this I pricked up my ears—she was threatening to commit suicide.

"That's not unexpected," I commented and proceeded to the bed.

Margaret presented a very sorry picture. Her face was drawn and white, and her facial muscles kept twitching involuntarily. Her eyes were closed. Every now and again her lips moved as though she were talking to herself, but the words were inaudible.

"Margaret!" I said quietly. She stirred a little but otherwise gave no sign of having heard, so I repeated her name. Slowly she opened her eyes and stared at me. At first she did not seem to believe her eyes. Then she wearily attempted to lift her hand, which had lain on the coverlet.

"George!" she whispered. "Is it really you? Oh, I'm so glad to see you. I wanted to see you to say good-bye."

"Good-bye? That's a very final sort of thing to say to a man who's come specially to see you."

"Well, it will have to be sooner or later, won't it, George? So why not sooner? There's nothing to live for now, and even if I did get well, something else bad would happen. I wish I had died after Isaac. But it's better not to take chances. I'm going to make sure of it this time."

She was clearly determined, for the moment, that suicide was the only way out. I had had such cases before, and my treatment of them had proved effective even if it was considered unorthodox by some. Usually, the patient's wish is opposed, and arguments against suicide are put forward. The result is that the patient's resentment towards the world is increased, and the desire towards suicide grows with it.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In a hospital."

"Oh, that makes it difficult. I wanted to put my head in the gas oven."

"That's as good a way as any," I agreed, to the surprise of the matron, who was standing by the bed. "It doesn't hurt. You just go to sleep, and that's the end of it."

"Is that true, George? I've often wondered. You do think it's the only thing to do?"

"If you want to," I said, to the increasing astonishment of the matron. "If you've decided life's not worth living and all the world is against you, then it's the sensible way out, surely."

She was silent for a little while. Then she spoke in a voice a little stronger and clearer. It was a good sign.

"You are very good to me, George. But it's impossible here."

And then I absolutely scandalized both the matron and the house physician.

"No, I don't think so. There's a gas jet in the wall—I suppose it's been left as an emergency reserve. If you can manage to stuff up the cracks in the door before you turn it on, I think the room will fill with gas sufficiently."

There was another short pause.

"Thank you, George. You're the best friend anyone ever had."

I was feeling hopeful. I had planted the idea in her mind that there was one at least who was willing to understand her and help her; and by just so much her resentment against life was reduced. I decided to try and plant another suggestion in her mind.

"I'll say good-bye to David for you, then, and I promise to look after him. He'll be a bit cut up, I expect, but I'll try to show him it's really all for the best."

"Poor David!" She lay back on the pillows and closed her eyes. "He's so good and kind and patient with me. Yes, he'll understand, too—especially if you explain to him."

"I'm sure he will. He'll miss you terribly. He's almost distracted already, because you went away like that."

"Poor David!" she repeated. "But I couldn't stand that woman any longer, George. She wanted to tell me what to do all the time. She told me I was trying to steal David away from her against his wishes. That's not true, is it?"

Mentally, I uttered every curse in the calendar against Mrs. Godfrey. If she had said that to a woman in Margaret's condition, she had done more than anyone or anything else to induce this suicide wish. I am a surgeon, but all the same I know the importance of psychological factors.

"It definitely isn't true. Listen. I was with David only yesterday. He's moved to a dirty little room just because he feels life isn't anything worth worrying about without you there. That's the truth," I added impressively. It was, perhaps, not quite the truth, but I think it was near enough.

"You like him?" she asked.

"Of course. And he needs someone to look after him. It's a shame he'll have to go back to his mother, I suppose."

She shifted a little on her pillow but made no comment, and I decided to withdraw. Outside the ward I turned to the matron.

"I expect you think I'm every possible sort of a fool," I said, taking the wind out of her sails. "But I've had experience of cases like hers fairly often, and I've known her and treated her for several years, particularly for mental states like this. I've found that particular line is usually successful. At best, the patient abandons the idea of suicide; at worst, he makes a half-hearted attempt which frightens him so that he never tries again. You see," I went on, feeling as though I were giving a lecture, and expecting the young house physician to produce a notebook at any moment, to judge from the intent look on his face, "she's feeling that all the world is up against her and ready to deny her everything she wants. So if you tell her suicide is wrong and she mustn't even think of it, her reaction is that even in this, when all she wants is to get out of everybody's way, you are trying to thwart her out of pure cussedness, and she feels all the more determined to do away with herself. On the other hand, if you let her feel that suicide isn't really such a wonderful thing and she'll hurt one or two people at

least, if she commits it, then you're getting her back to the right way of thinking."

"But surely, doctor, it's taking a bit of a risk to draw her attention to the gas burner in the room?" asked the matron, with a hint of disapproval.

"Why? If she had really made up her mind, she would have found it easily enough. Well, you'll see the results. If anything disastrous should happen, give me a ring—I'll let you have my private number before I go. Otherwise I'll be back some time tomorrow. And now, can I see the almoner?"

I felt fairly confident now that I could once again put Margaret on her feet, but I wished to make quite sure she was not put to any unnecessary strain, such as transference to a public ward would have imposed on her. My efforts were successful. I managed to retain the use of the private ward for at least a fortnight if necessary.

Next day, there having been no telephone call, I again called at the hospital. The matron herself greeted me.

"Everything all right?" I asked, not without a slight trace of malice.

"Yes, doctor. I admit I didn't expect it," she replied.

"Not even a half-hearted attempt?"

She shook her head. "No. In fact, she seemed a lot calmer after you'd gone, and she slept quite naturally. Dr. Frazer thought he might have to give her a draught."

"Good," I said.

Margaret smiled slightly when I came in, but I could see she was still in acute mental distress.

"What is the good of living and making plans?" she asked very dejectedly.

"Life is hardly worth while unless you do look ahead a bit," I replied. "However bad it seems, there's almost always something good to make up for it." I did not give her time to argue but ran on at once to a suggestion that I thought might help her to realize there was still a future for

her. "Would you like David to come and see you?" I asked.

She thought for a moment.

"Yes," she answered at last. "It would be nice to see him again."

My hopes were even higher now. That evening I called again on David. When I saw him I wondered if he, too, did not need treatment, but I fell back on more brutal methods based on common sense alone. He was still in a state of lethargy.

"Do you want Margaret or don't you?" I asked him bluntly.

"Of course I want her," he replied in a voice that suggested any other idea was unthinkable.

"Then pull yourself together and be a man," I went on roughly. "She wants to see you. But if you're going to enter her ward looking as you do now, I shall forbid it. You'd depress anyone."

"All right, Sava. I'll try."

"You'll do more than try," I said meaningfully.

It was the only way, and once again, it worked. And the next day, when I drove him to the hospital, he was almost cheerful.

His visit, though it did a lot for the moment to cheer Margaret up and improve her will to recovery, was to have consequences no one could have foreseen.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### “TWO STEPS DOWN”

MARGARET's condition was, for all its almost disastrous beginning, much better than it had been after Isaac's death. Once the idea of suicide had been rejected by her, she made a rapid recovery. I do not say her recovery was complete. It was far from that, but I felt that she could be trusted on her own. There was, I knew, some problem on her mind, for she had fits of abstraction that were very different from the state bordering on melancholia in which she had been before. I thought it better not to ask her what she was thinking about. The whole object of my treatment, if that is the right word for it, was to give self-confidence and make her feel that she was a responsible person with no need either to be dependent on anyone or to feel herself unwanted.

She saw quite a good deal of David during her re-creation. He himself moved from the dingy surroundings in which I had found him and took quite a nice service flatlet near the Marble Arch. I took Margaret out of hospital as soon as I possibly could, for I felt it was not the right environment for her, and she stayed for a short while with a friend whom she had met at the hotel where she had worked.

I was beginning to congratulate myself that all was going well when there was a fresh and surprising development. I had stayed late in my consulting-rooms one night, when I heard a ring at the door bell. Knowing that the receptionist had gone and that the housekeeper, who was partially deaf, would probably not hear the ring, I went to the door myself. When I saw David on the doorstep, I was frankly astonished. Immediately I suspected bad news, which, in fact, his agitated appearance alone might have suggested.

"Why, hullo, David," I said—I had seen a lot of him lately and we were now on more intimate terms, with, I believe, a greater mutual liking—"what can I do for you?"

"Can I come in, George? I'm very worried."

"Yes. Come along."

He sat silently for a few minutes in my room, and I did not press him. I thought it best to let him take his time and tell me his story in his own way and his own words without any promptings from me. At last he moistened his lips and, having glanced at me quickly, stared fixedly at the floor.

"It's about Margaret, George," he said slowly. Then, with a gulp, he added: "She's gone away again."

"Gone away?" I asked, startled out of the impassivity I had tried to assume. "What on earth are you talking about?"

"It's the truth. She was left alone in the house today—Mrs. Calthorpe has a job, you know—and when Mrs. Calthorpe came home, there was no Margaret, only a letter addressed to her."

"To Mrs. Calthorpe?" I asked, wanting to get every detail clear.

He nodded and gulped again. "Yes."

"What was it about?"

"There wasn't much in it. Margaret simply said that she'd made up her mind not to trespass on Mrs. Calthorpe's hospitality any longer and regretted that she had had to leave in a hurry without announcing her intention. She apologized and hoped that Mrs. Calthorpe would forgive her."

"That's not very informative, but it seems very queer."

"Yes. But that's not all. When I got home tonight, I found another letter tucked in my letterbox. It was from Margaret."

"What did that say?"

He felt in his pocket and produced a sheet of paper, but he did not hand it to me to read for myself. I could see that

it was already crumpled, as though it had been read many times.

"It really says"—once again he gave that nervous gulp—"it says—good-bye."

"Good-bye, David? What do you mean?"

"That's what she says. I don't understand it myself. She says she's been thinking it over, and she's come to the conclusion that she could only bring unhappiness to me, so it's better we should part. She goes on to say that everything she touches seems to have an unhappy end and she doesn't want to bring tragedy to me. She asks me not to try and find out where she's gone."

I was silent for a little while. I confess there was a certain amount of hurt pride in my immediate reaction, for I had been telling myself I had got Margaret well again, and here she was revealing symptoms of something very like a persecution complex.

"That's very extraordinary, David," I said rather weakly. "But it may be only a passing whim. You know she's far from stable just now, and when a woman's in that state she often does unaccountable things almost involuntarily. When she realizes all the implications she can't make amends fast enough."

"I wish I could think it was that," he returned gloomily. "But I've a feeling this is final. She was quite quiet and calm when I saw her last night—better than I'd seen her for a long time, in fact. A load seemed to have been lifted off her mind. Perhaps—perhaps she'd already decided on this. She's been worrying about something ever since she came out of hospital, but she wouldn't tell me what it was. It may have been something like this, and last night she'd made up her mind."

I glanced at him curiously. He was showing unusual penetration. Though he was obviously crushed and grieved, there was none of that helpless inertia about him he had shown when she had disappeared before. I could feel real sympathy with him this time.

"That may be so," I said, trying not to show that I was inclined to agree with his diagnosis. "But it's too soon yet to make up your mind for the worst."

"What can we do, George? That's the question. If she asks me, as she does in this letter, not to try to look for her, I can't do anything. She puts it in a way I can hardly ignore. I'm sorry I can't show it to you"—he coloured slightly—"but that is how I feel. And besides there's nothing much we could do in any case, so far as I can see. We can't put the police on her trail this time."

"No. That's true. She's a free agent to do as she likes, and we have no reason to fear any calamities. You yourself admit that she was calmer last night than you'd seen her for a long time. What does Mrs. Calthorpe say, by the way? I suppose you've seen her or you wouldn't have known about the letter."

"Yes. I went round there just in case I might catch Margaret before she left. I never dreamed she'd just walk out of the house and simply leave a note. That's incredible. Mrs. Calthorpe won't say much about it. She simply told me she wasn't altogether surprised, and she'd rather suspected something of the sort might happen. Whether she knows anything I can't find out. I suppose Margaret might have talked to her at some time or another."

"It's quite likely, since they were friends and lived together, though it seems improbable."

"I can't imagine her doing it. She was so very reserved about things like that. But it's terrible, George. I don't know what to do. She—she means so much to me."

Again I looked at him curiously. He was revealing quite unsuspected depths in his character, and I realized how profound an influence Margaret had had on him. Probably this lethargy and absence of aggressiveness were merely superficial—the end product of a long period of dependence on an assertive mother—and Margaret had been gradually wearing down the stucco façade to show the solid building

underneath. I felt sure that he would not have been able to assert himself and his feelings so positively when I had first met him.

"Your best course," I said firmly, "is not to brood over it more than you need, and to hope for the best. If it is only a passing caprice the next few days or a month at most will put things right, I'm quite sure. And if nothing happens, then we shall have to think what we can do. Don't take it too hard, David," I went on as sympathetically as I could. "I think I can understand what you are going through. It must be terrible to feel deserted or let down by the woman who means everything to you, especially after all the trouble both of you have been through. That's why I advise you to hope for the best. It will turn out all right in the long run, I'm positive."

He stood up and held out his hand. "Thank you, George. You've helped me a lot. You have the priceless gift of knowing how to be sympathetic without trying to dress it up in silly phrases. I'll do my best to keep going normally, and I'll just go on hoping."

"Come and see me whenever you feel like it if you think I can help," I rejoined, feeling a little embarrassed by this very undeserved encomium.

"I will, George. I'm beginning to understand why Margaret thinks such a lot of you."

With that he went. I was unable to resume the work I had been doing—the preparation of some notes for an article in one of the medical journals—and started thinking over this strange new development. Above all things, Margaret's conduct was quite unpredictable. Just when, after Isaac's death, I felt that the final blow had been aimed at her and struck her down, she recovered in an almost miraculous way. Now, when I had considered her restored to a rational way of thinking, she had astounded me—and David—by an almost unimaginable move.

Yet I felt she could not be expected to have the reactions

of a normal man or woman. All her life she had been dogged by as evil a fate as any woman had to endure, and the steady culmination of shock after shock must inevitably have rendered her emotionally unstable to some extent. She was not neurotic in the strict sense. She was rather like a soldier who has been badly wounded and who, for the rest of his life, feels unaccountable pains that have no purely physical origin.

Eventually I decided to try and take my own advice, given to David. I must take it as calmly as possible and hope for the best. I realized how fine-sounding those words were—and yet how empty as a guide to conduct. Hope means little unless it springs up spontaneously. When one hopes against an inner belief, it is only self delusion, the final collapse of which can be terrifying. And I had to be honest and confess to myself that I shared David's foreboding that this was no passing whim but the final decision after long and probably distressing consideration of the whole situation. This time we were, as David had said, helpless. The police would not look at the case—except perhaps to inquire why we were so agitated over nothing. There was nothing but waiting.

We waited, but no news came. The weeks slipped by, and when David called again to see me it came quite as a surprise that it was six weeks since his previous visit. He was looking haggard, white, and drawn.

"It does not look at all hopeful," he said wearily, as he sank into a chair. "I've played fair and not tried to search for her, George, but I couldn't help asking some of the people who might have met her. None of them has. She's just disappeared into thin air. You don't think . . . ?" He left the sentence open, but I caught his meaning at once. It was a possibility that had occurred to me several times. I was therefore quite ready with my answer.

"I don't think so," I said, shaking my head. "If she had, something would have come out by now, and Adler at least

would have heard about it. It's hardly possible nowadays for a body to go long undiscovered or unidentified." And I advanced the same arguments as I had used before: that if she had thought of suicide her method would be an obvious one. My cause was strengthened by the fact that when she had seriously considered it, she had decided on using a gas-oven.

David nodded but made no comment on my answers. "Have you seen Adler?" he asked.

I had to confess I had not. As a matter of fact, I had not given a great deal of time to taking practical steps. I was very busy at that time.

"I have. He's heard nothing, but he takes much the same view as you do and thinks that if anything serious had happened it would have come to light by now. Well, you're a doctor and he's a lawyer, so you ought to know better than I should about it. As a matter of fact, I don't really think so myself. I've got a hunch I shall see her again some time, somewhere. It's silly to rely on such things I know, but that idea has got a firm hold on me. Perhaps I'm only deceiving myself—'wishful thinking', as they call it nowadays—but I can't get away from it."

This was a very different David from the man I had seen in that shabby room. He was talking quietly and confidently, like a man who knew his own mind, and for a moment the fantastic notion crossed my mind that perhaps Margaret, knowing him so well, had deliberately staged this disappearance to bring out the best in him—as it had done undoubtedly. But I dismissed it. It was almost incredible that in her state of emotional upheaval she could have hit upon so subtle a scheme.

"As long as you have a real, living hope, it's all right," I said sincerely. "A 'hunch' is often as good as another man's rational argument. You can deceive yourself just as much by apparent logic as by relying on your feelings."

"Yes. Sometimes I wonder if a hunch isn't logic at a

deeper level—the logic of something more fundamental and perceptive than the mind itself—the something where the deep emotions like love and hate lie."

I gazed at him in astonishment. These were strange words to hear from him. He did not take my startled glance unkindly but smiled slightly.

"I suppose you think that a bit unusual, coming from me, George," he said quietly and with conviction. "But I've changed a lot since I've known Margaret, and particularly since all this happened. It's been a very searching experience, but I think it has taught me to see many things in a different and, I believe, a truer light."

"Misfortune often has that effect," I replied. "It steels one and forces one to face facts that normally one would seek to avoid. That sounds trite and obvious, I know, but it isn't only the so-called profound that expresses the greatest truth."

We lapsed into an uneasy silence, each busy with his thoughts. At last, with a sigh, he rose to go.

"I'll be going," he said. "There's nothing to be done. We must go on waiting, but I'm glad I've had another talk with you, George."

"You shouldn't have left it so long," I returned. "Come again soon. Why not go into the waiting-room for a bit? I've one more patient to see and then we can go out to a cinema and have dinner together. I think it might help to take you out of yourself."

He shook his head. "Thanks awfully," he said. "It's decent of you to think of it, but honestly I'd rather not. It's not that I want to brood or mope—I've got over that stage. But I like being alone nowadays and feel unhappy if I try to enjoy myself in the conventional ways. Perhaps it's some sort of mental growing pains. I don't know. But if you don't mind . . ."

"Of course not. In circumstances like these, it's best to rely on your own experience of what's good for you. All the

same if at any time you feel like company for an evening out, ring me up, and we'll fix something."

"You are very good, George," he said; and as he spoke those familiar words I had a mental echo of Margaret saying the same thing. How often had she done so! I felt suddenly very melancholy.

He pressed my hand warmly, and nothing more was said as I accompanied him to the door. On the step he paused.

"We shall have news—some day," he said and looked me straight in the eyes. He spoke with the conviction of a man buoying himself with a forlorn hope. His lips twisted in a half smile.

That picture of him, standing on the top of the short flight of steps to my door, and giving me that confident look, has burnt itself into my memory. Whenever I think of David, that memory comes back. It is curious how one comparatively unimportant experience of another human being sometimes becomes a kind of mental label for him.

He had said we must go on waiting and that news would come. I do not know what made him say so. Perhaps he did not know himself; it may have been merely an expression of that 'hunch' of his, about which he had spoken so seriously. But he was right. News did come. And as usual where Margaret was concerned, it came in a sudden and entirely unexpected form, in an atmosphere of tragedy.

Though the blitz had still to come, and the country was still in the throes of the 'phoney war', I was doing a certain amount of duty at night at the hospital. Though it was not strictly my work, I occasionally helped in the casualty department, dealing with the accidents caused by traffic in the black-out, the results of street brawls, and the hundred and one little mishaps that overtake peaceful citizens harmlessly engaged.

It was on one of these occasions that I found Margaret.

There was nothing that suggested her to me. A policeman brought in a woman. Blood was streaming from her face,

which was partly covered by a handkerchief, not too clean, which she held against it. One glance was sufficient to reveal what she was: a woman of the streets. We had quite a few of them in there at various times, the victims of street fights and drunken affrays, as likely as not instigated by themselves. And this particular specimen, standing sulkily by the side of the bulky policeman, who had pushed his steel helmet well back on his head, looked to me to be particularly tough and bad-tempered.

Rather wearily I nodded to the nurse to bring the case to me, as the house surgeon who would normally have seen her was otherwise engaged. As the woman drew nearer, I noticed that her clothes, which were shabby and rather flashy, were torn. The fight must have been a pretty serious one. Moreover she brought with her a powerful aroma of alcohol. It was not at all a savoury case.

I asked the nurse to bathe the patient's face carefully so that I could examine it. I preferred not to have to touch that plastered make-up, designed to give a false illusion of charm at a distance.

As the nurse got to work, I was suddenly filled with a feeling of familiarity. I had seen this woman before somewhere, I thought. Well, it was not unlikely. She had probably been in before as a casualty. She looked the type that might always be in trouble of some kind.

"What happened?" I asked the constable, as the preparations were being made.

He nodded sagely. "Nothing unusual, sir. She's been drinking a bit too much—but that's nothing out of the way for *her*." He spoke as one having special and intimate knowledge of his charge. "And she picked up a couple of men at the same time, and they were both of 'em pretty far gone. Of course, there was trouble. She wanted to go off with the younger and better-dressed one, but the other was a bit stronger. There was a fight and she got mixed up in it, trying to help the one she had got her eye on. Disgusting, sir,

I know, but you get used to it on this beat. It wasn't exactly a clean fight. I think she got a punch on the jaw—and bare knuckles can cause a lot of blood as you know better than me, sir. Things weren't made any better when another of those women came into the fight. Some of 'em will never learn sense and leave well alone. So I brought her along here. If you'll patch her up, sir, I'll take her along to the station and she'll be charged with the others with being concerned in causing a breach of the peace."

"A pretty sordid story, but it's quite familiar, as you say, officer," I remarked, and as I spoke I cast another glance at the woman, to see if she was ready yet.

Again I had that feeling of familiarity. It was too strong to believe that I had merely seen her in the ward before. I felt sure I knew her, though she had not been a street woman then. And I racked my brains to remember where it might have been.

At that moment she turned her washed face, which was bleeding freely, towards me. I gasped. Her expression changed from blank astonishment to sheer alarm.

"Margaret!" I exclaimed, to the obvious scandalized interest of the attendant policeman.

She did not answer but continued to stare at me in utter fear. Then turning, she tried to escape. But the policeman caught hold of her, none too gently, and the nurse helped him.

"You know this woman, sir?" asked the constable, all agog with curiosity.

"Yes." I nodded. I could not deny it now, even if I wanted to. "But she wasn't like this then. She is a very old friend. I knew her first in Germany a long time ago. A few months ago she disappeared, and her friends have been at their wits' end wondering where she'd gone."

"I see, sir." He looked as though he would have liked to take my story down, but I suppose he decided it had no evidential value for his purpose, though I had no doubt

he made a sharp mental note of it in case the information should come in useful on another occasion. And though he asked no more questions, he kept his eyes wide open to make sure he should miss nothing.

In silence, I proceeded with the examination. The injury was not serious, but she had been pretty brutally used for all that. The skin had been split badly in several places, and there was a huge bruise that would cause her discomfort for some time to come. The blow had been so heavy that I paid particular attention to the facial bones to make sure that none of them had been damaged, but everything seemed to be in order—though, of course, one can never be quite sure without an X-ray examination. But I decided the circumstances hardly warranted that.

I dressed the wounds and applied some lotion to the bruise. It was all I could do. Time alone would complete the healing process, provided the wounds were kept clean. But I rather exaggerated the extent and nature of the injury to the patient. I told her that unless she came back for a further examination in not more than two days, the results might be very serious; and I informed her she must come at the usual hours and ask for me. She looked very reluctant, though it was clear my gloomy prognosis had scared her—as I had intended it should. I meant to make certain that I should have an opportunity of talking to Margaret in less embarrassing and inquisitive company. When at last I let her go, she promised faithfully to come and see me the day after the next at the very latest.

In spite of that promise I was doubtful whether she would come. She did not seem at all anxious to talk to me—which was, perhaps, not very surprising. But something, at any rate, of her silence was due to her condition. Though I would not have certified her as intoxicated, she was certainly not far off, and I doubted whether she had all her faculties about her. That was an additional reason she might not come to see me. Quite genuinely, she might forget she had

ever made the promise—especially if, as I imagined, there was an unconscious desire not to keep it.

The next day passed, but it did not bring Margaret. Neither did the following one. I smiled grimly to myself. It was not to be so easy after all. But at any rate I had a clue and could find her if I thought it desirable. I had taken that constable's number, and no doubt he would be more than pleased to assist me in finding her, though I had not the slightest wish to enlist his help unless all else failed.

On the third day, however, I was just thinking of leaving the hospital when the nurse came to me and said another patient was waiting—a patient who said I had insisted that she should see me personally. I had attended her in the casualty ward three nights before.

"A woman who's no better than she should be," said the nurse tartly. She was not yet experienced enough to take these things for granted.

I was surprised, but I remained outwardly calm. In fact, I assumed an air of weary resignation.

"Oh, yes—I remember," I said. "Facial injuries caused by a fight of some kind. I was rather unhappy about the case. Very well. I'll see her. But you must make it clear to her that if she has to come again, she must get here in good time. I can't spend all day here." I spoke sharply as though it were in some way the nurse's fault. That sort of thing is expected of one occasionally.

Margaret came into my room slowly and hesitantly. The nurse lingered behind her.

"All right, nurse," I said, still using the sharp tone, to show I was annoyed with the whole business. "You can go. If I need you, I'll ring."

The nurse withdrew after casting a look of venom at Margaret, who was standing with lowered head opposite my desk.

"Sit down, Margaret," I said quietly. "I'm glad you've remembered your promise, even if it is a day overdue."

She sat down in the same slow, dazed fashion as she had entered the room, but she did not speak. Nor did I say anything more as I examined the cuts and bruises on her face. They were healing well, and there was really no need for anything but the simplest attention.

"Yes, they're all right," I said professionally. "Keep them clean, and put new dressings on night and morning. You must be careful, though. If you go on getting hurt like that, it may be very serious indeed."

"What does it matter?" she said in a dull voice, that yet had an edge on it. "If I die that way, it would be better than just lingering on and on."

It was the first remark she had made; and it admitted that there was still some sort of intimacy between us.

I smiled grimly. "So you've got back to that line, have you? After all the trouble we took to get you well. Not very grateful, are you?"

"I was grateful at the time," she said viciously. "But I'm not sure that I am now. It would have been better to get it over and done with."

"Seeing what has happened, I'm inclined to agree with you," I rejoined sharply. "You have very seriously hurt David in any case, but it might be better if he knew you were dead."

"Have you told him about me?" she asked, I thought a little anxiously.

I shook my head. "No," I said. "Not yet. But I think he will have to know. He's obeyed your wishes and refrained from looking for you, but there's nothing he wants so much as to have news of you. You haven't been very nice to him, have you?"

"It would have been worse for him if I'd married him," she said decidedly. "I should only have brought him trouble and suffering."

"You think you would have," I countered. "As it is, you have certainly done so—and there was no need. Why did

you do it? What induced you to take up this life of all things?"

She laughed metallically. "Why not? Didn't you start me on it, George?"

I gasped. "I did?"

She laughed again. "That's shaken you," she said. "Don't you remember when you got me that job at the hotel I said a bridge hostess was only two degrees above the streets? I was too old to go through the intermediate stage of dancing partner, so I took a short cut. And what's wrong with the life?" she went on aggressively. She had acquired, in this short time, quite a few of the less pleasant manners of the prostitute. "It doesn't give you much time for thinking. There's no room in it for worrying about the future. You just take each day as it comes, each person as he comes along. It may turn out well for you or it may be just the reverse. That's better than thinking you're all set for a good time and then finding you've made one big mistake."

"You're deceiving yourself, Margaret. You're trying to make out you're enjoying the life, when, as a matter of fact, it's just plain hell to you."

"Don't try to be clever. I don't enjoy it, and I don't dislike it. It's a way of making a living, as I haven't got the guts to chuck myself in the river, and it's got no responsibilities and no snags—except the attention of the police, but they're not too bad once you know how to manage them." She chuckled throatily. "That little affair the other night cost me half a quid and costs—seventeen and six in all. And that ruddy bruiser who coshed me got ten days."

I felt a little sick. I have no particular objection to swearing in women, though I cannot say I like it. Nor am I squeamish. But to hear Margaret, whom I had known as the charming hostess of a lovely home, whom I had seen bearing adversity with dignity, and who had been an almost ideal wife and mother, talking the language of the gutter,

was truly shocking. I did not let her see too much of my thoughts, however. It would have done no good.

"Well, it's your affair, I suppose. If this is the sort of life you want, I can't do anything to stop it—nor would I try, for that matter."

She shrugged, but I could see that my acceptance of things as they were rather surprised her.

"That reminds me," she said suddenly, with the uneasy air of trying to avoid an awkward discussion. "Was this face of mine really so badly hurt, or was all that you said to me just boloney to get me back here again and try to reform me?"

I shook my head. "No. Perhaps I did overstate the case a little, but I had no idea of trying to reform you, as you put it. You see, I'm always a bit anxious with women of your profession. The life you lead doesn't exactly lead to perfect fitness, and it's on that point that healing depends first and foremost. Often it's accompanied by not overclean conditions of living."

"I see. Well, you're very considerate for the fallen." Once more she laughed, but I detected a new note in the sound—a note that suggested I had made her feel very ill at ease and shaken her confidence badly. Her bravado had been undermined. "Do you want anything more with me?"

"No. You can go. You'll find nurse outside, and she'll show you out."

And then she did something which made me feel I wanted to seize her and shake her till she came to her senses. If it was meant to shock or scandalize me it failed. It merely made me see red.

At the door she turned. She looked straight at me and gave me the most horribly blatant professional smile.

"Care to come home with me, dearie?" she said in a sing-song voice.

I made a gesture of impatience. It had the desired effect, for she turned suddenly white with fright. I believe she

realized that I was on the point of losing my temper outright. She threw open the door hurriedly.

"If I were you, I would steer clear of fights in the future," I said.

She was gone. Whether she heard me or not, I do not know.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CORNER TURNED

THAT ENCOUNTER with Margaret caused me a great deal of worry. There was, first of all, the problem whether I should tell David or keep the far from savoury truth to myself. And almost equally important was the question whether there was anything I should do about the matter—whether I should take any practical steps to save Margaret not, as she thought my intention was, from the conventional ‘life of sin’ as from a rather dangerous frame of mind of which she was the unhappy victim.

For that, I was convinced, was the truth of the matter. Fundamentally, I knew she was extremely unhappy and that the life she was leading distressed and nauseated her. Her effrontery, her callousness, that horrible coarseness which contrasted so strongly with her natural quiet refinement—all these were assumed, though she barely recognized it herself. Yet she was not entirely dead to the realities. That look of fear that had crossed her face when she had first recognized me in the hospital was not a fear of me personally, but of the ties and promptings of the life to which she belonged, a fear that she would succumb and go back to the people and things she really wanted. That horrible gesture of defiance she had made as she had left my room was on the level of the child that puts out its tongue at its nurse. There was always the risk, of course, that sheer habit might so accustom her to the life that she would be unable to break free of it. But I barely thought so. In time, and allowed to work out her own destiny, she would reassert her own personality, and all these weeks would assume the

appearance of a nightmare, the memory of which would gradually fade.

After long consideration, I decided it would be better to tell David the truth. It was, I felt, my duty to let him know, and it would be cruel to allow him to stumble on the facts by chance, as he might do if ever he visited the West End at night. It would be a great shock to him, I knew; but certainly it would be possible for me to ease the impact as much as I could.

I reached this decision late one evening. The next morning I rang him at his works—he had been transferred to a Government factory now—and asked him to call and see me, if he could, late in the afternoon. I did not hint what I wanted to talk about, but he must have guessed it was something to do with Margaret. There was really no other point of contact between us, for though I had overcome my first aversion to the man, and had, indeed, come to like him in a detached, disinterested way, he was too characterless and neutral for me to make a friend of him.

He arrived at my consulting rooms about half-past six, and entered with an air of eagerness.

"What is it, George?" he asked at once, ignoring the politer preliminaries. "Have you got hold of some news?"

I could have wished he had not approached the subject so directly, yet it was as well to get it over as quickly as possible. I nodded gravely.

"Yes," I said seriously. "But you must not expect particularly good news. I want you to listen calmly while I talk to you."

He grew pale and sank back in his chair. Then he took control of himself—another indication of the change that had come over him recently and of the gradual development of his individuality.

"Very well, George," he said quietly, in a controlled voice. "I will do as you say. But first of all, please answer one question. I must know the answer. Is she—alive?"

Again I nodded. "Yes," I answered. "She is alive, and I think I can say she is quite well."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed and settled down to listen.

I found some difficulty in knowing how to begin, though I had carefully rehearsed the whole thing before he had arrived. However, as usual, I found myself proceeding on quite different lines. I always find it hopeless to plan the lines of an awkward interview in advance. My original intention had been to lead up to it gradually. But now I abandoned the whole idea. He seemed calm and in command of himself. I had prepared him for a shock of some kind, and he had braced himself. There seemed no point in trying to disguise the real state of affairs by useless periphrasis.

In phrases as simple and direct as I could make them, I told him the whole story: the encounter in the hospital, our mutual recognition, and the private talk that followed. He sat immobile during the whole of my account, and so far as I could see his expression did not change. When I had finished there was a long silence. I could say no more, and he apparently was allowing every detail to sink into his mind.

"My God!" he said at last, in a voice as intense as any I have ever heard; it seemed as though he crammed the whole of his power of emotional feeling into the words. "What a ghastly thing."

He relapsed into silence once more. Outwardly he was still calm, but I could sense the terrible conflict that was going on within him. Then he spoke again in a more normal, but still quiet, tone.

"What are we to do, George?"

"What is there to do?" I returned. "If she has made up her mind to lead this life, we have no right to stop her. It isn't as if you were her husband, David. A fiancé has no legal status in that way."

"I wish I were her husband," he said forcefully.

I looked at him. Once again he had packed a wealth of emotion into quite simple words.

"You still want her?" I asked softly.

"Of course," he replied, as though anything else was unthinkable. "What do you think—that I would desert her just when she needs help and friendship and sympathy most? Surely you don't think as little of me as that, George."

"I am glad to hear you say that," I replied. "Forgive me if I did allow myself to doubt. After all, many men would consider it the natural thing to abandon a woman who deserted them for the streets."

"It never even occurred to me," he responded.

"I admire you, David," I said sincerely.

He fell into silence again.

"Tell me, George, what do you advise as the best course?" he asked at last.

"It is difficult to say," I answered. "I've thought about it a lot. My own opinion is that it is best to do nothing for the time being, but wait developments. We have some sort of connexion with her now, and it ought to be possible to find out what's happening to her. I feel that if we go to her making appeals, it will only harden her. On the other hand, if we leave her alone, it's quite likely she will give it up and the claims of the old life, and of you especially, will prove stronger than this idea she has."

"Very much as you handled the suicide idea," he commented, seizing on the underlying principle at once. "I hate the thought of leaving her to that. Every moment now will be hell to me, wondering what she'll do—and—and what man has got his beastly paws on her." He shuddered. "But you were right over the suicide and I trust you to be right in this as well."

"Was I right?" I asked bitterly. "I thought we had cured her and restored her reason, and then she did this, which is the same drive in a different form. She wants to abase

herself, David, and has decided for the time being that this is the way to do it. It's not something anyone should sneer at. It's precisely the same as the urge which drives fakirs to sit on beds of nails and martyrs to scourge themselves. It has produced some of the greatest saints in the world. No," I went on, "I'm not trying to glamourize the prostitute like a Bloomsbury novelist of the 1920s. The majority of them are just commercially minded, and that's the beginning and end of it. The life seems to them an easy way of making money—till they come to realize, too late, the price that has to be paid for it. I believe that Margaret's adoption is caused by something very different. Don't think me blasphemous if I say it is almost religious—a desire to expiate sins. It's irrational, of course. But then it's just that that makes me believe she will eventually come back if we give her the chance."

"Yes. I can see what you mean, and I'm inclined to agree with you. Very well, George"—his voice was very low now—"I promise I won't try to interfere. But you must promise me something, too."

"What is that?"

"You must let me have every little bit of news of her that reaches you. I want to know everything."

"Very well. I promise."

"That's good of you, George. And I want to thank you."

"Thank me? What on earth for? You have strange ideas sometimes, David."

"I don't think so. Most people who had found out what you had would have thought it kinder to me to keep it to themselves. I look upon it as an act of real friendship that you have told me the whole story. Just suppose I had run across her accidentally in the streets . . ." He shuddered again. "In the blackout she might not have recognized me, and I might have heard her voice. . . . No, George, that would have been horrible beyond words."

"I had thought of that."

"Of course you did. That's why I want to thank you." He rose and held out his hand. "I can never thank you enough. You haven't left me to build up false hopes, but you haven't destroyed real hope. And if you get the chance, you can tell Margaret that I am still here, still waiting for her whenever she wants me." He spoke with a simple sincerity that was deeply moving.

"I will tell her that, if I get the chance," I said. "But you overrate what I have done. I still can't see that I had any other course open to me. If anything, you have the right to despise me for not having the courage to tell you at once."

He shook his head, but he made no further comment. At the door he just said good night and disappeared into the blackness.

I felt limp and tired after this interview. It had been a trying experience, and I think I was ready to curse Margaret Jacobi and all her works. She had brought me nothing but anxiety and trouble. Now I was saddled with fresh responsibilities. I had been given a watching brief for David, with instructions to plead his cause if the opportunity arose. As for David, I had come to admire him. He must have known the problems he was creating for himself by his steadfastness. I could not imagine that possessive mother of his taking at all kindly to the idea of his marrying a woman who had been on the streets and there was always the chance that her experiences would change Margaret yet again, making her a very different woman from the one of whom he had clearly built up, in these recent weeks, an idealized portrait in his mind.

Our roles had been clearly defined. I was to act as the possible point of contact; he was to play a waiting game. In theory it was quite all right. But I did not see exactly how I was to do my task without actively interfering in Margaret's affairs—and that I was determined to avoid at all costs. I decided that I, too, must wait and watch, and trust that the

Fate which had seemed always to bring Margaret and me into touch would continue to work in the same way.

I had not long to wait. Events moved more swiftly than I could have expected and led up to the next stage of a long-drawn, yet imposing, drama with almost startling rapidity.

It happened one day at the hospital. A message was sent to me that a woman wished to see me, and me alone. She was ill, but she would not allow anyone else to examine her. Nor would she give her name. I was busy when this message was brought to me, and its full import escaped me. Absently, I said I would see her as soon as I was free—and in the absorption in the work I had in hand I promptly forgot all about her. Two hours later, a worried nurse came to me and reminded me that the unknown patient was still waiting. I stared at her in bewilderment. What patient? The nurse told me the whole story again. Yes, of course I remembered now. And as I said that, it occurred to me that it must be Margaret.

"What is the woman like?" I asked. "Has she seen me before?"

The nurse nodded. "Yes, doctor," she said, answering my second question. "You treated her for face injuries some time ago and . . ."

That was enough. Of course it was Margaret. I told the nurse I would see her at once, and while I was waiting I speculated on what this visit might mean. It must be very important, I decided, if she was content to wait all this time to see me.

One look at her as she entered the room was sufficient to show that she was seriously ill. Her eyes had a feverish glitter and her skin had, beneath the heavy make-up, an unhealthy sallowness. She walked listlessly.

"Sit down, Margaret," I said and signed to the nurse to leave us alone together. "What is the matter? I owe you an apology for keeping you waiting so long and must confess I was so busy I forgot you were there."

"That's all right, George," she replied in a tired, weak voice. "I wanted to see you, because you know you are the only doctor I have ever really trusted. I feel terrible."

Without waste of further time I made an examination. I did not like what I found. It was not a condition to which any specific name could be put, but rather a general state in which almost every organ of the body was running below par. Though there was a lot I wanted to say to Margaret, I postponed talk for the time being. I had the impression she would remain very much in my care for some time. As I wished to make quite sure, I took her along to one of the physicians, who gave her a very thorough examination.

At last we were again in my room and she looked at me. There was apprehension in her eyes as though she feared what I was going to say.

"Well?" she asked. "Am I for it this time?"

I shook my head and smiled. "No. We'll pull you through. Never fear. You haven't got any special disease—you're just suffering from general debility as the result of irregular living: bad hours, too much drink, not enough exercise of the right kind, poor food, and being out in all weathers. What you need is a complete rest and competent treatment."

"I see. It sounds pretty comprehensive to me." She sighed wearily. "And where can I get a complete rest and competent treatment?" she asked with a touch of bitterness. "Every day I lose means less money."

"You'll get the first part of the rest here—you must go to bed at once. As for the treatment, that will be given by myself in collaboration with Dr. Venables, whom you've just seen."

To my surprise she burst into tears. "No, George," she sobbed. "I can't go into a public ward in a hospital, with everyone round me looking at me and asking nasty, nosey questions and looking nasty things at me. And I can't accept your generosity again, after all I've done and the way I've behaved towards you. I just wanted you to see me so that I could know what was the matter. I can look after myself."

I shook my head. "No, Margaret, that won't do at all. You'll stay in this hospital until I'm satisfied you are well enough to leave," I said firmly. "Otherwise—well . . ." I shrugged.

"You mean I shall die?" she asked calmly.

"You will get in a very bad state indeed."

"That doesn't matter very much," she said.

"On the contrary, it happens to mean a great deal to some people—your friends," I retorted.

"What friends have I?" she asked bitterly. "The other girls will help me as much as they can, but I haven't any friends left."

"I still insist on the title," I said. "And there is one other who told me specifically that if I got the chance I was to say he was still wanting you and waiting for you."

"Not—not David?" She turned her eyes, with their unnatural, warning brilliance full on me in wonder.

I nodded. "Yes. David. Listen, Margaret, he's had enough of suffering simply through your whims. I'm speaking straight though this isn't really the time for it. Let me get you well—I shall need your co-operation, of course—and then go back to him. You won't regret it—I promise you that."

"But—but—I couldn't. Not after . . ."

I held up my hand. "David wants you, and that's all that matters. Now," I went on, taking it the matter was settled, "there's no need for you to go into a public ward. We've a small private ward vacant—not one of the best, for it's right at the top of the building, but it is good enough. I'll see that you go there. Venable and I will do our best for you, but we shall expect you to behave yourself and do as we tell you. Then, when you're well enough, you can go and stay with David, or I can arrange for you to go somewhere else where you can be among friendly people and get plenty of rest and fresh air. How's that?"

"Heaven," she whispered. "It sounds like a dream, and

I expect to wake up at any moment. But George, why are you so kind to me?"

"Partly because we are old friends. Partly because I have developed a great respect and admiration for David. And partly because I think I know why you came here to see me and were prepared to wait a couple of hours for me."

"Oh, George, why was it?"

"Because you wanted news of the world you deserted, and I was the only one who could give it. You thought you were ill and the time had come. You came because almost from the day you took up this silly business you've been regretting it in your heart, though you've put on a great show of bravado."

"I suppose you're right, George," she replied. "Yes, you are. But I came here, too, because I felt that the end was near, and I just wanted one word with you before that. I wasn't sorry or frightened. I hate this business and all it involves, but I had some sort of a devil inside me that kept on driving me to it. In the early days I used to get a sort of savage satisfaction out of thinking of poor, respectable David realizing that his fiancée had become a common whore. But then I told myself he didn't know and probably wouldn't care anyway, and that rather took the gilt off the ginger bread. That night I was brought in here I had just about touched rock-bottom. How I loathed you, especially when you just didn't seem to care how or when I went to the devil. You were cruel that night, George. Did you know it?"

"Yes. I intended to be. I wanted to show you that you were doing what you were doing of your own free choice and that though it had hurt your friends, they weren't going to play your game by making a fuss about it."

"You're a clever devil, George. You always get your way sooner or later. You've won again. I'm here, and I'm ready to do anything and everything you say. You're so fiendishly right all the time. Yes, I did want to get back, but a sort of pride held me up. Oh, and as we're talking about this, I

want to apologize for that piece of beastliness just as I was leaving you last time."

I laughed. "Don't trouble, Margaret. It annoyed me and even shocked me at the time, but afterwards it was the thing above all others that gave me hope and encouragement. It was so very childish, my dear."

She looked at me and her eyes narrowed. "You utterly callous devil," she hissed; and then she laughed.

I think that laugh was one of the best things I have ever heard. It rang true. It spoke of a troubled soul that had suddenly and miraculously found itself again. It was the shadow of the new world to come for her.

"We've talked too much," I said rising. "You need rest—days and days of it—and good food. You stay here and I'll go and see about the ward."

When I returned from the office, having fixed up everything satisfactorily, I found her dozing in the armchair. She barely looked up as I entered. Already the dark things were beginning to fall away from her. I studied her for a little while as she half sat, half lay, in the chair, her eyes closed. She was very worn, and she had aged quite a lot. I wondered what David would think of her as she was—how the reality would compare with the dream picture he had been carrying about with him.

"I've arranged everything," I said loudly, to attract her attention. She looked up with a start. "And now you're going to bed."

I pressed the push on my desk and when the bell was answered I handed Margaret over to the nurse.

"She's going into F9," I said. "Sister knows and has seen to everything. Let me know when the patient is settled down, and I'll come and see her before I leave."

"Yes, doctor."

Left alone, I thought for a moment about this fresh situation into which Margaret had led me, and then, on a sudden impulse, I picked up the telephone and asked to be

connected to David's number. When he came to the telephone, after some delay, I asked him to see me that evening.

"I have some news," I added.

Immediately he was all eagerness. His voice took on an entirely new tone.

"Good?" he asked.

"Not so bad," I replied guardedly. "At least, I think you'll be pleased to hear it."

"Thank heaven," he exclaimed. "I won't be late."

As I replaced the instrument, the nurse entered to tell me Margaret had been installed in the little ward and had fallen to sleep almost at once.

"Good," I said. "She needs that above everything. Sleep. It's a wonderful thing, nurse. It's the nearest thing to death we experience, and yet without it life could not go on."

She looked at me as though I had taken leave of my senses. She was not used to philosophy on the part of the senior medical staff.

## CHAPTER XX

### MALICE

DAVID did not see Margaret for more than a week after I had told him the news—news which seemed to fill him with an almost ecstatic delight. Margaret, I decided, needed an absolutely quiet time, with no emotional upsets of any kind; and though I had seen David's eagerness to meet her again, I still had the doubt in mind over how she would compare with the ideal vision. If he turned against her at the last moment, the upshot would be disastrous indeed.

Margaret improved rapidly under those great curative agents, rest and good food. She had nothing to worry about now. Already she was settling down to normal and losing traces of her mad, yet compulsive, adventure into the *demi-monde*. Her voice lost the metallic edge that is the peculiar quality of prostitutes' voices. Her manners grew less aggressively assertive. Her eyes were no longer bright and hard. On the third day, in fact, she was practically the same as I had always known her.

I smiled so broadly at her that she noticed it.

"Why the smile, George?" she demanded.

"A greeting for a very old friend. Today I see before me the old Margaret whom I have known for so long—and a very satisfying picture it is."

She asked me to pass her the hand-mirror which lay on a table beyond her reach. For a few moments she studied her face carefully. Then she, too, smiled.

"Yes, I suppose you're right—as usual," she remarked.  
"It's definitely an improvement."

While I replaced the glass she was silent in thought.

"When are you going to let me see David?" she asked suddenly.

"As soon as I think you're strong enough to stand the excitement," I replied.

"Oh!" She looked at me shrewdly. Perhaps that doubt at the back of my mind had shown itself in my non-committal words. "Do you think that he's—he's likely to change his mind when he sees me again? Is that why you were so pleased at seeing what you called the old Margaret?"

"It's a possibility that has always to be faced," I answered calmly. "But it's no more than a possibility. It's difficult trying to keep him from gate-crashing into the hospital."

"Oh!" she said again, then she went on reflectively: "You know, George, lying here I've had plenty of time to think, and I think I've made one very big mistake at least in life. You see, I've always been groaning about my bad luck, yet really I ought to praise my good luck. There must be very few people in the world who have such good friends as you and David—friends whose trust withstands even such outrageous things as I've done."

"Now don't start that again," I said severely. "Don't whitewash me. David may be different. You can talk to him about it when you see him if you want to. But to me you're a very interesting case in a variety of ways, and you've given me plenty of opportunity of trying out my 'prentice hand in psychology. So I'm grateful to you—and we are not going to discuss it any more."

She smiled on me quite disbelievingly, and having assured myself that she was making real progress and that her lighter mood was not just a passing phase, I left her.

I arranged that at their first meeting, she and David should be quite alone, but I gave both of them the strictest instructions that the interview must not last longer than fifteen minutes. Just in case they should forget the passing of time, I told the nurse to knock hard at the door at the

expiry of the stated time, and if that failed to produce a response, she was to go into the ward after a further five minutes. Both of them knew of these arrangements, so if they ignored the warning, the consequences, whatever they might be, would be their own responsibility.

That meeting went off well. There were no upsets, and though David looked a little exhausted emotionally when I saw him before he left the hospital, he was obviously very happy and relieved. As for Margaret, she did not show any ill-effects.

"David is really wonderful," she said very quietly and sincerely, when I visited her ward later. Though this was all she said, I felt that her experiences—of which she never spoke—had brought out in her, as they had reacted on David, a greater capacity for affection and unselfishness.

As the results had been so satisfactory, I allowed David to call again on the next day but one. That, too, proving to have no bad effects on my patient, I then arranged for a daily visit if he and she wished it. They did, and he became a regular visitor to the hospital. I was not there, of course, every time he came—I had, in fact, made special arrangements to be there on the occasion of his first call, as he had time only in the evenings—but the nurses reported affairs to me. They seemed to have quite an affection for him, and described him to me as 'rather sweet'—which was hardly the term I should have thought of in his connexion.

About four weeks later, fully satisfied with Margaret's progress, I, in consultation with Dr. Venables, who had shown an interest in the case almost as great as mine after I had outlined the history to him, agreed that Margaret would benefit by a move to other surroundings. The office had been pressing for the use of that ward for some time, for though some of the beds reserved for war casualties had been released for civilian purposes, there was still a shortage, and they did not consider Margaret's case sufficiently serious to warrant her occupying a much-needed bed indefinitely—a

view in which, despite my one personal inclination, I had to agree with them.

It was not so easy to decide where to send her. Obviously she could not go to David's mother, nor did I think it wise to approach her friend Mrs. Calthorpe, with whom she had stayed before. That might lead to the re-opening of old wounds not yet sufficiently healed. I decided to discuss it with David and asked him to call on me one evening on his way to the hospital for his daily visit.

He came in good time—no doubt so that he should not be unduly late in visiting Margaret and wasting time on me that could have been spent more enjoyably with her—and seeing that he did not want to linger long with me, I put my problem to him at once.

"The time has come," I said, "when Margaret ought to be moved out of the hospital. Of course, she still needs a lot of rest and quiet. That's essential if she is not to have some sort of a relapse. But I think she would do better if she were away from the hospital atmosphere and in more homely surroundings. She must start to get about a bit, too. The question is where shall she go? Of course, she could go to a convalescent home in the country, but I don't think either she or you would particularly like that, and I'm not much in favour of it myself, except as a last resort if other means fail. Have you any suggestions to make?"

"Oh, that's all been settled," he replied airily, to my utter astonishment.

"It has, has it?" I retorted. "The impertinence of you people is amazing." I smiled to show I was not really angry.

"It's come to this, that you two are deciding on the course of treatment behind the backs of your medical advisers."

Despite my smile and the fact that I was using formal phrases quite unusual for me, he seemed inclined to take me seriously.

"Please don't think we'd do anything like that," he said quickly in some alarm. "You and Dr. Venables have been

so good, it's the last thing either of us would dream of. I want to thank Dr. Venables some time, George, please. He's been wonderful. So have you, of course, but then he's no personal interest in Margaret."

"I think," I said dryly, determined to put these surprising people in their place, "that he has found her case an interesting clinical experience, just as I have."

It was the same line as I had used with Margaret herself, and it produced the same crushing effect.

"I certainly asked for something like that," he said with a rueful smile. "But shall we return to the problem of where she's to go? You see, George, we've had a good many talks about the future—naturally it's the most important thing to us." From his manner they might have been young lovers, not a man and woman in an autumn romance. "Of course, this particular problem came up. If you think it not entirely out of the question, we would like to get married as soon as the time comes for her move. Of course," he added with engaging naïvety, "we'd go away somewhere quiet—I think, even with all these evacuees, I can get hold of a country cottage in Hampshire—and I'd see to it that she had a really restful time."

I wanted to laugh, but I restrained myself. There was something almost adolescent about all this. His course of conduct had some recommendations, but I saw also certain difficulties. I could not imagine that if his mother heard of this marriage, all his efforts would succeed in assuring a restful time for Margaret.

"Yes," I said, "that's all right. But wouldn't your marriage have—er—repercussions, as the diplomats say?"

He took my meaning instantly. "You mean Mother? I'd thought of that and so had Margaret—we're quite frank with each other on these things—and we propose to marry secretly. There's no reason why we shouldn't. Mother knows nothing about Margaret being here, and I've a fortnight's holiday due to me, which I can, I think, get

extended to three weeks, and I always go away by myself."

"If that's so, then I think it's a good plan," I said. "How do you propose to go about it?"

"If you'll name the date, I'll see about the licence and so on. I'll also fix up about the cottage. We can go straight to the registrar's office from the hospital and from there on to the cottage. At the end of the fortnight or three weeks, we can decide what to do, with you to help us, if you will."

"You've got it all mapped out very nicely," I returned. "Leave it like that. Margaret can be moved at any time now, so you can make your own dates. The sooner the better, though, from all points of view."

"Oh, George, this is simply marvellous."

The plan was duly carried out. A fortnight later, they were married, Venables, the nurse, and I, being the witnesses, and they went straight to Waterloo, where they took a train for Andover, near which town the cottage was situated. David having succeeded in getting his third week's holiday, it was agreed that I should go down and see them after the first fortnight, examine Margaret and see how she was shaping, and then we could decide on the future course of conduct.

At the stated time, I went down into Hampshire. They seemed delighted to see me, and I was very pleased with Margaret's condition. Physically and psychologically, she appeared to be completely recovered. I congratulated her.

"The future is up to you," I said. "This is where I retire from the case, apart from keeping a watchful eye upon the patient from time to time. If you want to return to town and set up house, there's no reason I can see against it."

They were overjoyed. They had already plans worked out for this particular contingency. Margaret had no objection to occupying the house in which David had lived with his former wife, and he had overcome or forgotten his aversion to it. She was, too, anxious to take charge of his

child. This seemed to please him immensely. But there was one great problem attached to all this. It would involve telling Mrs. Godfrey senior of the marriage, for she still had the child in her care. The consequences of that could not be foreseen.

"She will have to be told some time, and I'd like Margaret to have Edward with her as soon as possible. So if you think she's strong enough now, George, we're quite ready to face it."

He was right. It had to be done, and secretly I thought it better done while he was still in this mood of strong attachment for Margaret. He would have more courage to resist his mother's arguments.

Mrs. Godfrey's reaction was even more violent than had been expected. She stormed and raged, and at first refused point blank to hand over Edward, David's small boy. In some way or other, she had got to know Margaret's history, and she had not hesitated to tell Margaret to her face that "she had been on the streets, she belonged to the streets, and she'd go back to the streets".

But David stood firm. At that time, his courage was at its highest pitch. He told his mother that his marriage was his own affair, and that as regards Edward, if she refused to give him up, she would find herself in the Courts. A letter from Adler, who was now acting for David, helped here, and after a lot more unpleasantness, Edward was taken to the house in Chelsea.

The small boy took to Margaret at once, and the liking was mutual. As the months wore on, they grew more and more attached to each other, and strangers and chance acquaintances invariably thought the child to be Margaret's own, so close became the bond between them.

Left alone, these three might have enjoyed the happiest of family lives. They were bound together by real affection. Margaret had taken the two most difficult problems of a second wife in her stride: she had accepted her husband's

home as it was, without comment, and she had given her love to his child. It would have been difficult to have imagined a happier outcome.

But the very prospects of success inflamed Mrs. Godfrey all the more. She set about a campaign to win back her son; and from the day of moving into the new home, Margaret became the target for a long-continued series of scurrilous attacks.

By any and every means, Mrs. Godfrey sought to alienate her son's affections for his wife. She raved at him; she wheedled him; she kept throwing Margaret's past in his face and enlarging on the alleged evil effects she would have on Edward. Nor did she leave Margaret alone, but the full weight of the attack was not shifted to her till later.

At first, David gallantly resisted all attacks. He refused to hear anything said against Margaret and resisted all his mother's blandishments. I certainly admired him then, remembering how dull and lifeless he had once been in the face of opposition. He had never defended his first wife with the same spirit, and this was all the more remarkable in that he and Margaret were so disparate in age.

For a year or more, therefore, Mrs. Godfrey attacked without gaining any apparent success. But perhaps she knew her son better than any of us. She may have been surprised at his resistance but argued that he was fundamentally too weak to sustain that mood for long. She never once relaxed. If he did not go to see her, she called at the house, ostentatiously ignoring Margaret or speaking to her, when she had to, in the manner of a mistress addressing a servant. She telephoned him not only at his home but at the factory.

It was on one of these harassing visits that Mrs. Godfrey exceeded all limits. Turning to Margaret she ordered her from the room.

"I am not used to being in the same room with common prostitutes," she said.

Margaret flushed but said nothing, though she stood firm. It was David who lost his temper.

"If there is one slut in this room, it's you, Mother," he shouted. "Get out of this house. I never want to see you again. Get out, get out, get out!"

She went, white and frightened. Never before had he spoken to her thus. But it was high-water mark. The tide began to ebb, and David, in spite of himself, began to weaken.

That incident was intended to close all his relations with his mother, and for a time she kept away. But then he relented a little. She wrote to him that she was ill and wished to see him. Whether her illness was genuine or not, I was never told, but his going was the first sign of a crack. He had worn himself out in playing the unfamiliar role of his mother's opponent. I have no doubt Mrs. Godfrey, despite her alleged illness, smiled to herself when she saw how meekly he came at her call.

She had fresh opportunities a little later, when the blitz started, and Margaret and Edward were evacuated to the country, taking up residence in the cottage she and David had had for their honeymoon. Then David was utterly at his mother's mercy. Though he refused to go and stay with her, he saw much more of her than he would have otherwise, and on the occasions when I met him I could see that her influence was beginning to reassert itself.

I was alarmed. It was not so much with David's problems that I was concerned as with Margaret's. If things like this were happening, there was a fresh disillusionment coming to her. How would she take it next time? It was a harassing thought, and I tried my hardest to keep her memory constantly before him. It is unwise to interfere too openly in family squabbles, and I realized that David was going through a period of doubt. If I had come out boldly in opposition to his mother, I might easily have driven him to her support.

In the summer of 1941, Margaret and the boy returned. This was the signal for Mrs. Godfrey to begin her attacks on Margaret. She wrote insulting letters, any one of which would, if published, have provided Margaret with a first-class libel action. They became so crude and hurting, with their insinuations that she had seduced David and led him to the gutter, that Margaret went so far as to consult Adler about them.

He had shaken his head gravely.

"They're absolutely damnable," he said fiercely. I could imagine his dark eyes flashing. "But there's nothing in law you can do about them. They're not libel because they haven't been published in the legal sense—that is to say, if a third party has seen them it is with your consent, unless you can prove that Mrs. Godfrey has exhibited them before she dispatched them, which would be very difficult. You could, I suppose, apply for police protection, but even so they contain no actual threats of violence or acts likely to cause a breach of the peace. No, Margaret," he had concluded, "I'm afraid there is no alternative but to grin and bear it as best you may—or put anything with that handwriting on it in the fire."

It was not only letters. A barrage of telephone calls was put up, until David decided to have the line taken from the house.

There is one small example of the utter unscrupulousness of Mrs. Godfrey which shows the depths to which she would descend. It was something in which I was personally concerned.

I had happened to call one evening to have a chat, knowing that David would be late back. That was in fact the reason I had chosen that day, for I knew Margaret hated to be alone in the evenings, and she could not go out because of the child.

The telephone rang, and Margaret started. She had already begun to fear the insistent ringing of that bell.

"Answer it, George," she said.

I picked up the instrument and said "Hullo!" It was a woman's voice. I asked her who it was when she inquired for Margaret and found it was Mrs. Godfrey. Knowing what she wanted, I told her that Margaret was out, and she rang off. It was a simple enough thing, and Margaret looked relieved when I told her what had happened.

The very next day Mrs. Godfrey telephoned David and told him she must see him at once. Rather weakly, he went. It was a fine tale she had to tell him. As soon as his back was turned, Margaret had all sorts of men in the house. Not only that, but she refused to answer the telephone and told them to say she was out. If in fact she did go out and leave them in the house, it was utterly disgusting, and if her going out was a lie it was no less heinous. Even Margaret would not be able to deny the facts, Mrs. Godfrey asserted.

Margaret did not. Nor did I. But David was worried. It was not that he believed the extravagances of Mrs. Godfrey's story. It was simply that I had said Margaret was out. It had been a slight to his mother. The way he said that made me anxious. It was clear he was going back to the old position of mother-dependence.

The cumulative effect of all this was inevitable. It was maintained continuous for month after month, and, with David's resistance rapidly weakening, Mrs. Godfrey found ever new means of attacking Margaret. The result was that the two grew fractious with each other. The old harmony was destroyed, and there was none of the old calm that once had marked their home and their relationship.

So it went on. In 1943—it was spring, I remember—David had so far succumbed that he had tentatively raised the question of separation or divorce with Margaret. She had hotly rejected the mere idea, and he had been obviously glad that she had. But later the question came up again and this time he was a little more persistent. He pointed out that their home life had been destroyed and that it was

rapidly growing impossible. Conditions were not fair to either of them.

Mrs. Godfrey had found a new line to work. She was telling him his association with Margaret was inimical to his career. She was not the sort of woman who could help him. If he wished to entertain influential friends, their wives might be insulted if they discovered that their hostess had been a street-walker. She chose her moment wisely for this, for David was in the running for a fairly big appointment as a government engineer, and a certain amount of social activity would have been attached to it.

When I was told about it, I asked David to call on me. I was going to have a straight talk with him.

"David," I said when I had settled him. "Do you still care for Margaret?"

"Yes," he said, but without enthusiasm.

"Then why all this talk of divorce?" I demanded.

"Well, you know, George. Things aren't going too well now. We don't seem to get on, and I think it may be better for both of us."

"You know very well why things aren't going too well," I pointed out. "If a third party interferes in a marriage, something is sure to go wrong."

"But I can't refuse to talk to my mother."

"You did once," I reminded him.

"In a fit of anger." He looked thoroughly uncomfortable.

"You don't even have those fits now, do you? No, David, you're not playing at all a nice game. You've got to make up your mind whether it's your wife or your mother you prefer—and if it's the latter, then be honest and tell Margaret so."

"But why can't we all live together happily?" he said piteously.

"Because it takes three people of good will to do that, and your mother has made up her mind to be as brutal as possible to Margaret."

"I can't refuse my mother," he insisted, with the stubbornness of the weak.

"If it's necessary for your wife's happiness, you can and should," I said. "In fact, you shouldn't hesitate."

"I can't see that."

"Listen. Your mother is your mother, but you had no choice in the matter. You chose your wife of your own free will, and I admired you once for the way you stuck to her in spite of everything. If you felt like that once, you should remain true to it, or admit that it was a mistake. You're asking for a complete collapse on Margaret's part, and if that happens I shan't be able to take responsibility for her case again."

"Did I choose her of my own free will?" he asked. He was echoing the suggestions put in his mind by his mother.

"Of course you did. Nothing would have been easier than for you to have dropped her. I expected you to—so did Margaret. Yet you held firm, to your great credit. That is what makes all this so despicable. You're back where you were when I found you that day in that horrible room."

He was silent under my onslaught. When at last he spoke again it was in a more reasonable key.

"But what could I do to stop it?" he asked.

"See Adler or some other good solicitor. There must be ways and means of tackling it."

"I couldn't take legal action against my own mother," he almost wailed.

"Once again I remind you that you didn't hesitate to threaten to once—over Edward," I said. "Can't you see that once you were ready to do all the things you now say are impossible? That means only one thing: you're tiring of Margaret and prefer your mother."

"No, no!" he protested.

I had hurt him, and I knew it. I had intended to, and I proceeded without pity.

"Hasn't Margaret looked after Edward wonderfully for you? Did your mother do as much? Did your mother give you the same sort of home—a home where you were wanted for yourself and not as a sort of superior lap-dog? When you were pretty cut up over your first wife's death, wasn't it Margaret who gave you renewed hope in life? Your mother didn't. She was almost glad to see you a widower, wasn't she?"

He sprang to his feet with a cry that was not far from hysteria.

"I can't stand it, George! It goes on day after day, and all I want is peace."

"Peace for yourself, but not for Margaret," I responded remorselessly. "Yes, David, I can understand. But you can stop it—and you alone. Show your mother, as you did once before, that she counts for little beside Margaret and that you intend to be master in your own house and things will come right. If you don't—then I fancy you'll lose Margaret anyway—not through the divorce court, as you hope, but by death."

He cried out again and fled from the room. I heard the street door clang.

How it would have eventually turned out, I cannot imagine. They would probably have drifted on, rudderless, till the marriage foundered irretrievably. But an unexpected solution was at hand. David was killed in the 'baby blitz' of spring 1944. His troubles, his problems, were solved for him. The hand of Fate had struck at Margaret and her affairs again.

I remember going to see her soon afterwards. She was surprisingly calm and self-controlled. She must, I think, have worked out her instability in her previous experiences.

I was naturally sympathetic. I felt aghast at this fresh tragedy in her life and said so.

"Perhaps it isn't a tragedy," she said. "Perhaps it is what they used to call a blessing in disguise. I should have lost

him anyway," she went on, "and it's better this way than—than the other. Somehow I don't mind losing him in the way that so many others have died in this ghastly war, but it would have driven me mad to know that I had lost him to another woman—and she his mother. He might have run after something younger and more attractive, as Isaac did. But to play second fiddle to his mother . . ." She made a gesture of disgust. For a little while she paused, and then, her eyes moist, she peered out into the weak sunshine. "We could have been so happy together if we had been left alone—just David and Edward and me—so happy."

I pressed her hand. It was all I could do.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE END OF THE BEGINNING

YES, HERS was a curious story, and well worth the telling.

That was what I felt as, my mind having retraced the paths of the past, I returned to the present. All those happenings seemed so long ago, yet really most of them were close at hand in point of time. And so many of the actors had departed. Only Margaret and little Edward remained. Isaac, that erratic business genius, was gone. Else, who had flowered so late and so beautifully, was gone. David, who had attained for so short a time the status of a man, was gone. These were the people who had twined themselves round the creeping vine of Margaret's destiny, altering its direction and stultifying its growth.

Only Margaret and little Edward were left. Must the same malign fate dog them still? Must Edward share the black doom that had so long attached itself to Margaret? Must she herself continue to endure it, having paid so high a price for the little happiness she had had?

The questions angered and saddened me. What could I do to defy the tragic force that influenced Margaret? I stood up. There was much I could do, and I owed it to her to do them. She was still facing a crisis. There was still a threat to her. If she was left in peace with little Edward, I believed that she might yet end her years in tranquillity. And I reflected that they could not now be so very many.

I kept my promise. I called on her at her friend's flat in Bayswater. She was better than when I had taken her there, and had recovered from the dull stupor in which I had left her. Her friend, Jane Merrow, was a level-headed,

practical woman, and I have no doubt that her shrewd good sense had had not a little to do with Margaret's rising spirits.

"We're going to make a fight of it," I said. "First of all we'll go and see Adler. I'm sure he'll be overjoyed at the thought of having a crack at Mrs. Godfrey. You remember what he said about those letters."

"Is it any good?" asked Margaret dubiously. "I mean, I'm sure to lose."

"You are not," I retorted warmly. "But we'll take Adler's opinion on it."

There and then we rang him up and made an appointment for the same afternoon. When we arrived, he greeted us pleasantly.

"What is it now?" he inquired.

I told him. As I proceeded he nodded from time to time and made a quick note. When I had finished he leant back, read through his notes, and cleared his throat.

"I think we have a very good case," he said, and I saw Margaret's eyes open wide in hope. "Certainly I'll handle this, and I think I know the very man to take it into Court. But there's—er—a difficulty. He's an eminent man—Kenneth Mallardine—and I'm afraid his fees are a little high."

"That's all right. I'll guarantee all costs. I'm determined to see this thing through," I said.

Margaret protested. "George, no, really. If it means that, we'd better let it go."

"Let it go?" I cried. "Are you trying to deny me the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Godfrey sent home with a flea in her ear?"

She smiled faintly, but made no comment.

So it was arranged. The action was, of course, already in train, since Edward had already been removed under an interim injunction of the Court. And the trial itself was due in three weeks.

There was little enough time, and I spent quite long periods in conference with Adler and Mallardine, the counsel. He struck me as a very shrewd man who would be difficult to circumvent in Court. He seemed to foresee everything that might happen and was ready for all emergencies.

And so at last we found ourselves in the Court. The surroundings had the usual air of depressing lifelessness. I looked at the opposing counsel—a well-known K.C. who had with him a junior hardly less well known. Mallardine appeared alone.

Right from the start, it was obvious that the other side were going to throw in everything against us. Leonard Hyatt, K.C., began his opening address with a rather bored air that suggested the whole thing was unnecessary and the result a foregone conclusion in his favour.

"My lord," he said—there was no jury, of course—"this is a case in which there is a conflict for the custody of a child. The child is Edward Godfrey, the son of David Godfrey, an engineer, recently deceased, who lost his life by enemy action in this country. On the one hand is the mother of the child's father, Mrs. Julia Godfrey, whom I represent. On the other is Mrs. Margaret Godfrey, an English subject of alien origin, the wife of the deceased."

The judge looked up and peered through his gold-rimmed spectacles.

"If the wife is alive, the question of custody hardly arises, does it?" he said.

"The widow is not the mother of the child, my lord. Edward is the issue of a previous marriage."

The judge nodded and signed to him to proceed.

He did so, leaving out nothing. The whole of Margaret's life history was set out, in a very biased and coloured way, and as much made of her lapses as possible. It was pointed out that she was of enemy-alien origin, that she had been under medical treatment on several occasions for mental instability and had threatened suicide, and—the K.C.

produced his trump card—had actually led the life of a common prostitute on the streets of London.

"My contention is, my lord," counsel said, "that this woman, notorious for her loose living and subject to mental attacks that lead her to perform the most inexplicable actions, is not a fit guardian for this child. The grandmother, for whom I appear, contends that the custody should be with her, especially as she believes that to have been her son's wish. I need hardly remind your lordship that there is a third alternative, which is that the child should be made a ward of the Court, but with so eminently suitable a person, allied to the child by close kinship, available as Mrs. Julia Godfrey, that would seem to be a mere theoretical possibility."

He called his witnesses. No trouble or expense had been spared. There were nurses from the hospitals who spoke of Margaret's strangeness, and the matron of the hospital who had been so scandalized by my treatment for the suicide wish. There were two prostitutes who had known Margaret well during that black interlude; they spoke of her as one of the toughest among them. The case was built up damningly, and I sympathized with the hopeless look that grew over Margaret's features.

I tapped her knee to draw her attention.

"Don't take it too hard. This is all on one side," I whispered. "Wait till Mallardine gets going."

She made a pitiful attempt to smile.

Mallardine did not cross-examine these witnesses to any great degree. He made the prostitutes admit that much of their evidence regarding Margaret was based on hearsay, and that Margaret had always been a 'bit of a puzzle' to them. But that was the only point he seemed to score. I felt a little disappointed, but I did not realize that the methods in this Court had not the colour of those in the criminal courts.

When the last witness had stood down, he rose and adjusted his gown.

"My lord," he said, "the issues in this case have been very clearly put before you as a conflict over the custody of the child Edward Godfrey. It is represented that Mrs. David Godfrey, the father's second wife, is an immoral person entirely unsuited to have charge of a young child, and that custody should, in the child's interest, be assigned to the grandmother. It is perhaps not without significance that the other side failed to put Mrs. Julia Godfrey in the box so that the Court could judge whether she was a suitable person, nor would they submit her to cross-examination. I propose at a later stage, with your lordship's permission, to call this lady myself, and ask that she be treated as a hostile witness. I think it important that her own statements should be heard.

"Much play has been made of the fact, which no one denies, that Mrs. Margaret Godfrey, the widow, has been treated on several occasions for unstable mental conditions. In modern terminology, that word 'unstable' hardly carries the connotation it has in popular usage. Few of us with nerves—and most of us have in these days of air-raids—would care to be described as 'unstable', yet a psychiatrist or medical psychologist would have no hesitation in doing so. I ask you, my lord, to note that point.

"Everything depends upon the matter of character. It seems to me that the most pertinent question in this case is what the wishes of the father would have been. Unfortunately he left no testamentary directions on this score, so we must endeavour to arrive at those wishes by inference from facts. What, then, are the facts? On his marriage he removed the child from the care of his mother and brought him to live with his new wife. They took to each other from the first, and I will produce witnesses to testify to the happy relations that existed between child and stepmother. For the whole period up to Mr. Godfrey's death, Mrs. Julia Godfrey made determined efforts to wreck the marriage and take away the child from her new daughter-in-law. All of

these the husband resisted, obviously preferring that the child should remain with the woman he had chosen to be his wife. It was, in fact, not until some time after his decease that the question of custody was raised. An interim injunction to remove the child from Mrs. Margaret Godfrey's care was obtained *ex parte*, and it is this injunction which the Court is now reviewing. You shall hear, my lord, how Mrs. Julia Godfrey endeavoured to evade the terms of that injunction by trying to obtain custody of the child for herself —a course to which she had no legal right."

He was building up his case with great care, letting each point have its full value. Certainly, he was making it very impressive, and already the cloud was lifting from Margaret's brow. But I was not so hopeful now. Everything really depended on Margaret's moral character; and in dealing with that the other side had a very damaging weapon in their hands.

Mallardine went on quietly. There was no means of seeing how he impressed the judge, who remained like an impassive bullfrog on the bench, his scarlet robes drawn tightly about him.

At last, Mallardine reached the point of calling witnesses. It was then his lordship directed the lunch adjournment. I was glad there was no jury, for the break would undoubtedly have lessened the effect of counsel's speech.

After the interval, Mallardine put me first in the box. I was asked to give an account of Margaret's medical history, which I did as concisely as possible. Then I was asked questions about my personal relations with Margaret and her own personal history.

"Are you of the opinion," asked Mallardine, "that Mrs. Godfrey is of a markedly unstable psychological type?"

"No," I answered. "Considering the series of shocks and tragedies she has endured, I should say she is, rather, resistant. Most women condemned to her experience would have developed much more marked signs of hysteria."

"And you feel yourself that she is quite a capable person to have charge of a child?"

"Speaking both as one who has known her for many years and as a doctor with her case history fresh in my mind, I say 'yes' emphatically," I returned. "The relations established between her and Edward during David Godfrey's lifetime were ideal."

"Thank you, Mr. Sava."

I was cross-examined, and the other side tried to shake my evidence by suggesting I was unduly influenced by personal friendship, and, strangely, antipathy to Mrs. Julia Godfrey, whom I had met only on that one occasion.

"Did you suggest to the deceased that he should break with his mother in order to keep his wife?" the K.C. asked.

"I did. I was advising him that he must make a choice."

"And he did make a choice?"

"Yes. He preferred to remain with his wife."

The proceeding went on. There was Margaret herself. My medical testimony was reinforced by that of Dr. Venables. Various nurses gave evidence. One or two of Margaret's friends went into the box, and then Mallardine paused for a brief dramatic moment.

"Mrs. Julia Godfrey," he called.

David's mother went into the box. There was hardly any need for the barrister's request that she should be treated as a hostile witness, for she cast on him a glance of malevolent hatred.

He led her along gently at first. Then he asked her:

"From the moment you knew of your son's marriage, did you embark upon a campaign designed to alienate his affections from his wife?"

"I certainly tried to make him see sense."

"'Sense' being, in your view, divorce or separation?"

"Yes. She is an immoral woman and she had an evil influence over him."

"Did you, as part of that campaign, write abusive letters to your daughter-in-law?"

"I reminded her of the truth from time to time."

He picked up a paper. "Is it the truth to say, then, 'You are a thief'?"

"Every prostitute is a thief."

"You can prove that?" he asked suavely. She flushed and even the Court smiled.

"Did you try, when you had obtained the injunction, to take away Edward by force?"

"I certainly tried to take him home with me. I wanted him removed from evil influence."

"Despite the clear terms of the order and that your son had not considered Mrs. Margaret Godfrey an evil influence," commented counsel.

"She had bewitched him," snorted Mrs. Godfrey. "It was her trade to get men under her thumb."

The judge adjusted his spectacles. "I do not think," he said slowly, "that this Court is competent to consider allegations of witchcraft."

By the end of it, Mrs. Godfrey was cutting a very sorry figure. Time and again, Mallardine read passages from her letters and asked her to give their substance; but she could not. She had been caught out by a master. Her own counsel had been too wise to put her in the box; he had not bargained on Mallardine taking the courageous course he did.

Finally, Mallardine turned to the judge.

"I ask leave, my lord," he said, "to put the child Edward Godfrey in the box."

The judge assented. Mallardine asked him one question.

"You have stayed with your grandmother and you have stayed with your stepmother, whom you call 'Mummy'. With whom would you rather stay?"

The answer came clearly and decidedly. "With Mummy." And he covered his face in his hands.

This concluded the case on either side, and the judge proceeded to his summing-up and judgment.

"This case is, as regards its facts, quite a simple one. It has been alleged that because a certain person has done a certain thing, held to be immoral, that person is an improper person to have the custody of a child. The facts about the person concerned, Mrs. Margaret Godfrey, are not in dispute. She did ply the trade or calling of a common prostitute, but it has been no less clear that she was not a regular professional, nor did she remain long in that pursuit. The reasons for her adopting this strange calling have been described to us by eminent medical witnesses as a form of over-compensation arising out of a persecution complex. But however that may be—and to the layman it is not very illuminating—there is no doubt that at the material time she was suffering from acute mental distress, and was in a state likely to give rise to somewhat peculiar behaviour. Her whole life seems, in fact, to have been composed of tragedy, of which the latest is the loss of her second husband in a bombing incident. I hope she will permit the Court to express its deep sympathy with her in this loss."

It was a graceful thing to say, and Margaret reddened a little as the judge bowed slightly in her direction.

"The alternative to Mrs. Margaret Godfrey as guardian of the child is Mrs. Julia Godfrey, the child's grandmother. Here again, no facts are in dispute. The child had been taken care of for some time by this lady and she was obviously in close contact with her son.

"What I have to decide is, in effect, which of these two ladies is the more suitable—I will not on this occasion use the ungallant expression 'less unsuitable'—for the purpose. Thanks to the respondent's counsel, we have had an opportunity of seeing both ladies in the box.

"It seems clear to me that Mrs. Julia Godfrey was undoubtedly activated by malice towards her daughter-in-law

and was engaged in a form of persecution designed to rescue, as she thought, her son from the toils of a designing woman. That is a point I have to keep in the forefront of my mind, for I have to ask how far this application by her is an extension of the same persecution.

"The child concerned has been in the witness box and expressed his preference for his stepmother—which again I have to bear in mind, for I do not think any one of us could doubt the spontaneity of that statement.

"I must confess that I should have considerable reluctance in entrusting the custody of a child to a woman who has been a common prostitute, whatever the reason for her action. At the same time, I should be no less reluctant to entrust the custody to a lady who has shown herself to be filled with vindictive malice and determined to break up a marriage which showed every prospect of being happy and lasting.

"It has been pointed out that there is a third alternative before the Court—namely that I should direct that the child become a ward of the Court. That is true, but it is not a course I feel inclined to take unless all other means fail.

"The decision therefore is all the more difficult to make just because the facts are clear and not in dispute. I have, in effect, to express a personal preference for one lady or the other on the evidence put before me and from the opportunities I have had of seeing the ladies in question, and I have to take special care that my decision is not biased by my own private beliefs and opinions in a subject in which moral considerations are involved.

"Having considered it all very carefully and put this fact against that, this piece of evidence against another, I have come to the conclusion that the more suitable person is Mrs. Margaret Godfrey . . ."

Margaret pressed her hands together and a couple of tears stood out in her eyes.

". . . but," continued the judge, "I do not feel I would be acting properly if, in the light of all the circumstances, I

were to make that order permanent. My judgment is, then, that the child shall be in the custody of Mrs. Margaret Godfrey for a period of twelve months from today; that during that period the child shall be visited frequently by an experienced welfare officer to be approved by me, and that at the expiry of the period the matter shall again be brought before me for a final judgment. I also direct that, during the period named, Mrs. Julia Godfrey shall refrain from any efforts to interfere with the conduct of either the child or Mrs. Margaret Godfrey or make any fresh attempts to obtain custody."

He ceased and Mallardine jumped to his feet.

"As to costs, my lord?"

"I do not think I am justified in making any order. It will be better if both sides pay their own costs both here and in the proceedings in chambers."

He rose and left the Court. The few spectators shuffled away. The counsels tied up their briefs and began chatting with their solicitors and clerks. After a little time Mallardine came to us and shook hands.

"Not quite what we hoped for, but a good beginning," he remarked. "The old boy would have gone entirely the other way, I'm sure, if it hadn't been for those damning letters. You did well, Sava," he added turning to me. "I must remember you when next I want a medical witness. That Russian blurr of yours is most effective."

We laughed. A few minutes later we left the Court and piled into my car—Edward included. He was overjoyed at being with Margaret again and sat on the floor of the rear part of the car, drumming his heels happily.

Margaret sighed and I looked at her.

"It's something gained," I said, "something worth while. You've got Edward. And this time there will be no looking back. You've had your share of trouble."

"I do hope so, George," she said. "I don't think I could stand any more."

“Frankly, I don’t either. But there won’t be any. What are you going to do now?”

“Take a rest. And then perhaps I shall be able to settle down in a little place of my own and look after Edward. It will be heaven. You won’t forget to come and see me, will you?” she added a little anxiously.

“No. As a matter of fact, Adler had a word with me and said he felt certain some surety for your good behaviour would be required, so I said I would act if need be.”

“Thank you, George. As always, you are very good to me.”

“Very good to me”! The phrase that had been on her lips and David’s! Yet what had I done? Nothing I had attempted had held off the sword of destiny. Nothing I had done had swerved the spear of tragedy from its course. I had merely meddled in certain things and had sometimes brought off what looked like a success but all too often vanished in the night.

I set her down at her friend’s Bayswater address. She thanked me again, and Edward smiled at me. As I drove off I looked back at them, oddly contrasted figures in the gathering dusk. I hoped that the gloom closing in on them was not an omen. And then I laughed. I must not give way to superstition and mysticism.

All that was nearly a year ago. The period of probation is nearly expired, and no one concerned seems in any doubt what the final decision will be. I have called many times at the little flat Margaret has taken near the park, and can vouch for the complete accord that exists between her and the boy. The welfare officer, who comes from the local children’s court, expresses himself as fully satisfied. Adler is already preparing the final application.

And there it is best to leave them, on the dawn of a new period that may bring happiness at last to Margaret. The power of her evil star has waned. She has had success but more tragedy.

I can see her now playing with the child. There is a new light in her eyes—a light of peace, of sober maturity, of sober hope. Perhaps after all, one's destiny is made within, and it is one's attitude to life that matters most. I do not know. But that look is surely one that sees into the future and sees that it is good.





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